

EGYPT IN ITALY

Visions of Egypt in Roman Imperial Culture



MOLLY SWETNAM-BURLAND

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EGYPT IN ITALY

This book examines the appetite for Egyptian and Egyptian-looking artworks in Italy during the century following Rome's annexation of Aegyptus as a province. In the early imperial period, Roman interest in Egyptian culture was widespread, as evidenced by works ranging from monumental obelisks, brought to the capital via the Mediterranean Sea by the emperors, to locally made emulations of Egyptian artifacts found in private homes and in temples to Egyptian gods. Although the foreign appearance of these artworks was central to their appeal, Molly Swetnam-Burland situates them within their physical, social, political, and artistic contexts in Roman Italy. She explores evidence for the artists who produced these exotic-looking artworks and examines their relationship to the contemporary literature that informed Roman perceptions of Egyptian history, customs, and myths.

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FRONTISPIECE. Visitors to the Temple of Isis in Pompeii (Jean-Louis Desprez 1779).

Photo credit: Gianni Dagli Orti / The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY.

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INTRODUCTION: FROM EGYPT TO ITALY

“Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons, but also about ideas, about forms, about images, and imaginations.”

Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), 7.

This book investigates the Roman interest in Egypt in the century and a half following its annexation as a Roman province, as mediated by visual and textual material from Roman Italy. In this critical period, Romans “invented” Egypt in both the ancient and modern senses of the word.¹ Conquest brought Egyptian materials as large as obelisks and as small as scarabs before audiences for whom they were novel, thus enabling the discovery of a different culture. Roman understandings of this foreign culture were necessarily constructed, drawn from what Romans in Italy thought they knew of Egyptian history, habit, and religion more than from firsthand experience of the place and its peoples. Egypt was an imagined place as well as one that could be visited, explored, or exploited.

I take as a given that Roman attitudes to Egypt were shaped by conquest, the product of ways of thinking about the world that insisted on the centrality and cultural hegemony of Roman Italy, whether we label these habits of mind and practice “colonialism,” “imperialism,” or something else.² In this sense, the taste for works of art from far-off places or evoking foreign styles was inherently political, reflective of the reality that one region (Italy) held sway over the other (Egypt). Yet I resist explanations that frame the phenomenon solely relative to specific historical periods or as reflective of the idiosyncratic tastes or religious beliefs of the emperors. Watershed events – the death of Cleopatra, Augustus’ triple triumph, Hadrian’s travels – shaped public interest but do not wholly explain it. Underlying any aesthetics that prized Egyptian and Egyptian-looking artworks were complex processes of transculturation, played out over long periods of time, in communities with their own

practices of votive commemoration, patronage, and artistic production. My thesis is that, however unusual in appearance, these works of art must also be understood as Roman cultural products, their many meanings dependent first and foremost on context and audience. Egyptian-looking artworks were foreign-seeming, in the sense that they were marked by visual difference. But they do not need to be explained away as non-Roman or treated as historiographically “other”; to the contrary, they are central to any explanation of the Roman visual arts that purports to be comprehensive. This is the first work of scholarship that takes as its express goal the integration of exotica into the intellectual and social history of Roman art.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND FRAMEWORK

The historical period addressed in this book begins with the defeat of Mark Antony and Cleopatra at the battles of Actium and Alexandria and the Roman annexation of the territory of Egypt into the province Aegyptus. There was, of course, ample contact between Italy and Egypt before this point, based on trade and diplomacy, but it was only in the imperial period that Rome came to depend on staple goods from Egypt and that the taste for Egyptian-looking works of art became most prevalent.³ Rome was a capital of the Mediterranean world, with an increasingly diverse and multicultural population. Egypt’s grain fed the urban poor and became such a pivotal (and dependable) part of the economy that bushels of Alexandrian wheat acted as currency of a sort, serving as collateral for loans and underpinning a thriving futures trade.⁴ Many other products – oil, wine, papyrus, and innumerable smaller luxuries – were so vital to daily existence that Pliny the Elder could report that a shortage of papyrus during Tiberius’ reign almost brought the government to a standstill.⁵

Without doubt, conquest inspired widespread interest in Egypt, evident in both artworks and literature of the early empire: Augustus circulated coinage that proclaimed “Egypt has been taken!”; poets celebrated the decisive battles, from Vergil’s depiction of the battle of Actium on the shield of Aeneas to the less famous but no less pointed *Carmen de Bello Actiaco* preserved in a papyrus from Herculaneum.⁶ The Augustan age, however, was not a time of first contact with Egypt. Some knowledge of Egypt’s people, gods, and cultures was widely disseminated long before Augustus claimed Egypt for Rome. By the early empire, most Romans could recognize Isis’ distinctive iconography. Roman poets made reference to the deity, playing on the fact that their readers had more than a passing awareness of her unusual attributes. Ovid, for instance, creatively inserted Isis into a story in his *Metamorphoses*, in which a woman pleads for divine aid for a daughter she has raised since infancy as a son. Isis complies and changes the child’s gender. Ovid’s Isis is powerful and benevolent, and his detailed description calls to mind representations of



FIGURE I.1. Bronze statuette of Isis-Fortuna (first century CE).

Photo credit: Koppermann: Neg. D-DAI-Rom 60.490.

the goddess from shrine paintings or statuettes from Pompeii, Herculaneum, and other sites: “Moon-like horns and regal ornament were upon her brow, of bright gold with sheaves of yellow wheat.”⁷ [Figure I.1] In the visual arts, an Egyptian-looking style came into vogue in diverse media. One of Rome’s citizens constructed a tomb in the form of a pyramid. Some wealthy homeowners in Rome and Pompeii painted their walls with images of Isis and other Egyptian subjects, at times using a bold, primary color palette that highlighted the unusual subject matter. These many and varied celebrations of Egypt’s annexation, however, give the false impression that transition to Roman control was seamless and taken for granted by those living in Italy. To the contrary, the decade following Actium witnessed numerous small rebellions within the province, including a border dispute in the South that required a military response.⁸ Tensions within the multiethnic population of Alexandria posed a serious risk to the grain supply through the Julio-Claudian period and sometimes necessitated imperial intervention.⁹

For the century following annexation, symbolic control of Egypt and its resources remained critical to the emperor’s public image. Vespasian’s nearly

year-long stay in Alexandria, called by Suetonius the *claustra* or “lock” guarding Egypt, proved vital to his success in vying for the principate in 69 CE and also provided the fodder for rumors showing that he possessed the *maiestas* or “divine majesty” necessary to serve as emperor. While in Alexandria, Vespasian made a visit to the Serapaeum, where he experienced a vision of himself bestowed with the customary offerings given to Serapis, likening him to the god and suggesting his suitability for rule; later, like Serapis, he seemed able to heal the injured. Returning to Rome, he and his sons spent the night in the city’s largest sanctuary, the Iseum and Serapaeum in the Campus Martius.¹⁰ Hadrian, too, included a long stop in Egypt in his travels around the Mediterranean, during which his lover Antinous met his untimely end.¹¹

Both periods saw waves of interest in Egypt in the arts of both the public and private spheres. Domitian rebuilt the Iseum and Serapaeum Campense after the devastating fire of 80 CE, thereafter one of the grandest structures in the Campus Martius. Recent work suggests that Hadrian’s Villa included a lavish temple dedicated to the Egyptian gods, and Egyptian and Egyptian-looking works stood in conversation with those that emulated the masterworks of Greece along his sumptuous “Scenic Canal.”¹² A wide range of Egyptianizing works owned and commissioned by ordinary citizens, too, date to these periods – votive obelisks, statues of Isis and Serapis, sculptures of Egyptian animals. Mosaics from private homes included motifs of pygmies and nilotic animals. Sculptures of personified Niles paired with Tibers were a common visual metaphor for the very empire itself. By the mid-second century CE, the terminus of the present inquiry, the infrastructure that delivered Egyptian grain, antiquities, granites, and marbles to Italy was well in place, aided by new and often-improved canal systems and Roman roads in Egypt, such as the Via Hadriana and Via Traiana. Egypt had never been closer to home.

Throughout the period covered in this study, the sanctuaries to the Egyptian gods were fixtures of Italian cities. Eventually, the cults spread to all corners of the ancient world, and their members included men and women of varying backgrounds and social classes. There had long been worship of Isis and Serapis in Italy, at best guess beginning with increased trade with the region in the second century BCE, mediated by merchants and first introduced in the port towns and cities of Campania. But even long established cults were revitalized in the period following conquest. By the late first century CE many Italian sanctuaries, as in Rome, Beneventum, Praeneste, and Pompeii, could be found interspersed with the most important structures in Roman cities, located in densely urbanized regions. Isis exercised a universal appeal, a promoter of prosperity and fertility, and protector of women and children.¹³

Discussing Rome’s relationship with Egyptian culture within these political and religious contexts, as is often done, is both necessary and worthwhile. Yet to move forward, we must also ask more probing questions – not segregating exotica but pressing to integrate them into our study of Italian votive,

commemorative, and decorative practices, and exploring too the relationships between the literary and visual arts. Who commissioned Egyptian-looking art, and who made it? What is our evidence for Egyptian immigrants in Italian communities? What did Romans in Italy know of Egyptian culture and history, and based on what sources? How were foreign materials integrated into preexisting practices of dedication and devotion? How did Latin authors write about Egypt, its peoples, and its gods?

Such wide-ranging questions do not yield a tidy explanation or definitive account of something one might call a Roman Egyptomania. This, however, is to the good. Roman interest in Egypt was neither brief nor passing. It spanned centuries, attested in all domains of social life, public and private, sacred and profane, political and personal. In short, the Egypt one finds in Roman Italy are as manifold as the contexts providing evidence of them.

EGYPT IN ITALY: RECONSIDERING, RECONTEXTUALIZING

Investigating Roman interest in Egypt can set us on unsteady ground. Even the simplest seeming question – what did the Romans know about Egypt's history? – leads to quagmires, because both literary and archaeological source material sometimes prove difficult and contested.

To take one example, briefly consider Manetho's Αἰγυπτιακὰ, a history of Egypt written during the reign of Ptolemy I Soter (satrap, 323–306/4 BCE; r. 306/4–283/2 BCE) or Ptolemy II Philadelphus (r. 283/2–246 BCE). Its composition forms a pivotal moment in Greek historiography, for Manetho was a native priest who wrote in Greek, therefore representative of both the Greek and Egyptian populations of Alexandria. One of his most important contributions was the division of Egyptian history into dynasties, δυναστεῖαι, a method of organizing time that derived from Egyptian king-lists and annals, like that recorded on the so-called Palermo Stone. Manetho's work remains fundamental to the way historians and archaeologists frame Egyptian chronology today, though now established largely on other grounds. Little acknowledged, however, is that this key source was only preserved through Roman-period interest and intervention.

Manetho's text is long lost, painstakingly reconstructed by philologists from the nineteenth century to the present, who have culled references and redacted quotations from later authors. Much of what is left are short summaries condensing his history.¹⁴ This practice of abridgement was common in antiquity and indicates that a source was important, widely enough read to warrant this Cliff's Notes treatment either as rhetorical exercise or educational aid. We do not know when Manetho was epitomized; his history could have been abridged at any time (and in any place) after he wrote the work, though it makes sense to associate this act with the Ptolemaic library of

Alexandria. Yet there are no extant references to the summaries until the late first century CE, when Josephus made use of them in the *Contra Apionem*. Where and how did Josephus come across this obscure history? Although widely traveled, he did much of his writing in Rome. And another historian to make use of Manetho was Aelius Claudius, who resided in and worked from the nearby town of Praeneste. It is possible, therefore, that manuscripts of Manetho were available *in Italy*. And it is manifest that the epitomes of Manetho were in circulation and found their widest ancient readership during the Roman period.¹⁵

While this source-history brings us no closer to answering the simple question posed earlier, it does highlight several critical issues and point to some useful conclusions. First, at least some educated Romans had access to information about Egyptian history, culture, and religion; knowledge was not limited to those involved in the Egyptian cults. One need not look far for confirmation: Plutarch had access to specialized sources on the myth of Osiris; Ammianus Marcellinus quoted a book that translated the obelisks in Rome; Apuleius nodded to the ritual language employed in aretalogies of Isis.¹⁶ Second, the Roman conception of Egyptian culture and history differed greatly from any history of Egyptian civilization we would write today, particularly in its understanding of chronology and religion. As a source used in contemporary scholarship, Manetho remains relevant to continuing debates about the date of the Pentateuch, testifying to the rich hybridity of Ptolemaic culture.¹⁷ Roman-period readers and writers, however, used Manetho for purposes all their own, often in support of arguments about the relative antiquity of cultural groups in the Mediterranean. Indeed, that the text they read and the one we have reconstructed are close to the same is an assumption that, however likely, should not be taken as a given. What we can take as fundamental, however, is that Roman interest in Manetho, shaped by different agendas from our own, ensured its transmission.

The Romans played an active role in preserving for posterity literary and material evidence of immense value for the study of Egyptian religion, culture, and history. We must take care not to conflate our systems of evaluation with those of the Romans, however, or to judge Roman-period knowledge by modern metrics. This basic point applies doubly to the aesthetics that motivated Romans in Italy to collect antique Egyptian artifacts, all the more crucial because so much of what we know of ancient Egypt derives from the careful and systematic study of material culture. The artworks that give testimony to Rome's interest in Egypt are by no means unknown. They are inextricably entwined with the discovery of Egyptian culture by the European West, and generations of scholars have expertly catalogued and discussed them, from the early modern period through the present day.¹⁸ Yet one result is that assumptions about the values of these materials – aesthetic, monetary, and evidentiary – are so long-standing that they have become invisible. Many



FIGURE I.2. Detail of the “Mensa Isiaca” (first century CE).

Photo credit: Gianni Dagli Orti / The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY.

Egyptian and Egyptian-looking artworks came to light in the context of the early modern and Renaissance re-urbanization of Rome. This means, first and foremost, that information about context is often sorely lacking. These exotic works were prized by collectors as *objets d'art*, status symbols that conferred prestige on their owners; their discoverers did not document findspots as we would today. Many changed hands multiple times, eventually making their way into private collections and the major public museums of Italy, France, and Great Britain, there reflecting those societies' claims to the heritage of Classical Antiquity and Dynastic Egypt.

Renaissance humanists studied Rome's Egyptian monuments with the express goal of uncovering a lost, mysterious culture, and they saw the Egyptian and Egyptian-looking monuments primarily as material evidence of Dynastic Egyptian history and religion. Often, it was difficult to determine whether a work was Egyptian or Italian-made. So, for example, Brian Curran has outlined the unusual story of the object known as the “Mensa Isiaca,” a bronze inscription, inlaid with gold and silver, covered with hieroglyphic-looking text and Egyptian imagery. [Figure I.2] It was presumed to be from Egypt, and quickly mythologized; some claimed it had been acquired by Augustus after the siege of Alexandria. In 1556, Pierio Valeriano attempted to decode the hieroglyphic script using its enigmatic text. It moved from collection to collection, increasing in monetary and perceived historical value with each transaction.¹⁹ Today, the object is considered to be of Roman date, and perhaps even of Italian

origin. Its texts are not thought legible in any literal sense. A recent scholarly treatment by Heike Sternberg-el Hotabi has shown that even the few characters longest thought to be meaningful, a supposed cartouche of Claudius, are as “fantastic” as the rest.²⁰ This text was never intended to be read as early humanists tried to decipher it.

Despite more recent scholarly correctives, a lingering result of early inquiry into objects like the “Mensa Isiaca” is the investiture of authenticity in Egyptian imports in contrast with Egyptian-looking, Italian-made emulations. Lacking legible hieroglyphic text or employing imagery used contrary to what is perceived to be proper convention, such artworks may appear to be “spurious,” “incorrect,” or “derivative” when measured by that standard. Yet in this case, as Sternberg-el Hotabi and others have shown, the monument – though not Egyptian – may nevertheless have been richly symbolic.²¹ If we place greater interpretative emphasis on the contexts in which these works were found, contexts in which Egyptian and Italian-made works were often displayed together, it becomes evident that any value judgment prizing Egyptian over Roman-made, even if tacit, is untenable. Both are equally worthy of study, and bear equal testimony to the Roman interest in Egypt. As important, however, is to recognize that, though Egyptian imports certainly have much to tell us about ancient Egyptian history and culture, if we think of them *only* or *primarily* as Egyptian we constrict fruitful avenues of interpretation.

More extended consideration of one case, an Egyptian hieroglyphic inscription found in Pompeii, will serve to drive home this point. [Figure I.3] It was originally part of a limestone sculpture in the round, discovered during the excavations of the sanctuary of Isis in Pompeii reused as facing for a statue base or plinth in front of the small temple. The Egyptian text of the inscription remained unpublished until 1857, when it came to the attention of scholars working in the then nascent field of Egyptology, including Gustav Seyffarth – who argued fervently that this piece proved wrong Champollion’s phonetic and ideographic system for deciphering the hieroglyphic script. Seyffarth’s own system of translation followed more closely the description of hieroglyphic characters in Clement of Alexandria. In his view, the inscription was a dedication made by the Pompeian Isiaki to honor the emperor Vespasian.²²

Today, we have a very different understanding of its content. The text states that the dedicator, a priest named Semtawy-Tefnakte, presented a gift in honor of his patron deity, Harsiphef. Composed a year or two after Alexander the Great’s conquest of Egypt in 323 BCE, it is a rare testament to the experiences of a man who lived under three different regimes in Late Period Egypt: the priest gives thanks for the benefits the god has shown him throughout his life; he mentions having been given his privileged position by the last Egyptian king, Nectanebo I, and praises Harsiphef for assuring his safety as first the Persians and then the Greeks took Egypt by storm.²³ Conceived as an Egyptian object, the value of the Pompeian inscription to the historian is clear. In recent



FIGURE 1.3. Hieroglyphic inscription of Sementwy-Tefnakhte from the Temple of Isis in Pompeii (manufactured after 323 BCE; imported to Pompeii, first century CE).

Photo credit: Ministero per i Beni e la Attività Culturali, Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei.

years, the standard historical narrative for this period, previously driven by Greek and Latin sources, has undergone a sea change in favor of approaches that balance the seminal narratives of Herodotus, Diodorus Siculus, Strabo, and others with Egyptian sources and material culture, including graffiti, sacred dedications, and documentary papyri.²⁴ Although rare, Egyptian

sources like this one reveal cultures in contact, as local elites tried their best to accommodate themselves to rulers with worldviews different from their own. Fascinating as it is, however, this is not the only story this object has to tell. To understand the redisplay of this piece in the Pompeian sanctuary, we must refrain from prioritizing the object's creation over its reuse or favoring literal meaning over symbolic.

Anthropologists and archaeologists have long argued that material goods reflect culture; the *chaînes opératoires* used to manipulate any raw substance to finished handicraft reflect the societal organization and internal value systems of a community.²⁵ In this way, facture reveals cultural identity. Once created, however, objects sometimes take on lives of their own, beyond the intentions of their makers. Objects are both portable and mutable. Over the course of time, objects may be subject to repeated modification that alters their physical or functional nature, as, for example, they deteriorate through use and are repaired, traded, bought, or sold. Recent work across a number of academic disciplines argues for conceiving of material objects as imbued with agency in their interactions with their makers, owners, and viewers – that is, the ability to shape human experience. Some are even viewed as magical, perceived to have power that breaches the rules of everyday existence. On this view, artworks and artifacts have individualized histories that reflect their presence and movements through time and space and which encompass a number of different human interactions.²⁶ Reuse is reinvention.²⁷ Yet agency is not innate to the object but is a product of interpretation; the human mind creates and constructs meaning, even if unconsciously. The functions and symbolism of objects are always dependent therefore on the social and cultural context of the viewer.²⁸

Egyptian artworks brought to Rome can be understood to have long and varied “biographies” that included any number of interactions with their owner(s) over time, from creation at the hands of artists, through modification or adaptation to new settings or uses, to their eventual destruction or deposition.²⁹ A number of changes were made, in fact, to the hieroglyphic inscription from the Pompeian sanctuary: the limestone panel was planed from the sculpture's plinth, and its surface pierced with a number of dowel-shaped holes. In the process, much was lost. Nothing remains of what we assume was a costly dedication; there are remnants of text on both lateral sides of the inscription, which suggest it once contained a wider range of religious or efficacious formulae. At the same time, changes that look like damage from the perspective of the student of ancient Egypt reflect a process of remaking from the vantage point of the Roman art historian. The changes made to the physical object re-commodified it, assigning to the same piece of stone a new set of values, both monetary (as an object that could be traded or sold) and symbolic (as bearing extra-pecuniary significance).

What, then, might the Pompeians have understood the object's value to be? The many changes to the artifact suggest that the Roman owners prized its Egyptian text, though they almost certainly could not read it in a literal way. As I discuss in [Chapter 1](#), only a select group of cultic professionals in Italy had any knowledge of the language system as practiced in Egypt. There is no evidence for such practitioners in Pompeii. Nevertheless, it could have been meaningful to those who saw it displayed there. A few ancient sources describe the hieroglyphic script. By and large, they explain Egyptian writing as a symbolic system rather than a linguistic one. Roman-period authors believed that hieroglyphic characters contained information, but understood the meaning to be conveyed on an allegorical level.³⁰ It would be a mistake to cast indecipherable or pseudo-hieroglyphs as devoid of meaning because they do not retain their original, literal linguistic values. The Romans did not misunderstand these texts; they understood them differently. In its new context, the Pompeian inscription was deeply meaningful, performing an entirely new function, at once decorative and symbolic and religious. It stood as proof of the antiquity of Isis as patron deity and testament to her mysteries. It demonstrated a tangible link between the Pompeian cult and the homeland of the goddess. In sum, as a material object, this single piece of stone provides valuable information about the upheaval following Alexander's conquest of Egypt and about the Roman interest in Egypt centuries later. It is both Egyptian and Roman.

For many reasons, considering the biographies or diachronic histories of Egyptian and Egyptian-looking objects is a useful exercise. Lacking archaeological contexts for many pieces, we may instead train our attention on physical condition, considering what deliberate changes or repair can tell us of the many complex interactions with the piece over time of those who traded, collected, displayed, and sometimes even broke them as a way of mitigating what we must assume was an extraordinary ritual potency. Viewing the artworks and artifacts in this way, too, helps us bridge the gap between treating imported materials in Italy in binary opposition, as either Egyptian or Roman monuments: they are both. There *may* or *may not* be a relationship between the lives and afterlives of any given object, depending on the knowledge, understanding, and interpretative practices of the people involved. Concurrently, even a perceived relationship can be fundamental to the formation of meaning, whether or not the perception is accurate from an historical or scholarly perspective. The study of any act of appropriation requires striving to understand both the object within its original cultural context (what was appropriated) and the re-creative act through which that object became adopted and adapted as an emblem or artwork of a different or later culture (how, why, and to what ends it was appropriated), always with a sensitive eye to possible differences in interpretation between our own understanding of object

function and ancient understanding. Often, the spaces between provide the most fertile ground for inquiry.³¹

As the foregoing discussion demonstrates, these materials defy simple classification. The categories we use to describe the exotic material culture of Roman Italy – Egyptian, Egyptianizing, *aegyptiaca*, *Egyptiana*, *Pharaonica* – are of our own devising and, generally speaking, organize the material by place of production, as I discuss in [Chapter 1](#), separating those made in Egypt (imports) from those made in Italy (emulations). They are necessary rubrics for helping us make sense of artworks that are by nature diverse, and they are particularly useful for studies that take them as a point of departure for looking at broader questions about the practice of religion in the Roman world.³² In my view, it matters little which word we use, so long as the assumptions that govern our choice of terminology are made explicit. But it is vital to recognize that these categories do not capture essential features of the works in question. Instead, they describe where they fit into our own interpretative schemes.

The last decade has given rise to new approaches to *aegyptiaca*, looking more closely at the relationship between artistic representation and ritual practice. A few scholars, particularly Romanists, have called for reassessment of the corpus, arguing that there is a binary divide in scholarship on Egyptian and Egyptian-looking materials in Roman Italy, which generally treats them either as “religious” (that is, as evidence for the Egyptian cults) or as “exotic” (that is, as decorative, their value derived from their unusual appearance).³³ This dichotomy stems from the fact that these objects stand at the juncture of a number of academic disciplines, Egyptology, Classical Studies, Art History, and Religious Studies. All share a common goal, to better understand the cultures of the past, but each employs its own methodology, asks different questions, and values evidence differently.

Take, for example, two panel paintings from Herculaneum that depict Egyptian rituals. One, particularly well known, shows a congregation of worshippers standing to either side of a monumental stairway, where an Egyptian priest holds forth a mysterious golden object [[Plate I](#)]. A second, less often illustrated, also shows Egyptian rituals, with priest and followers dancing in the open air [[Figure I.4](#)]. Both paintings have, by and large, been approached as evidence for ritual practice, as if they were sketches from the daily life of Italian congregations; they have largely been discussed independently.³⁴ Although we lack precise information about their context, both panels likely came from a domestic setting where, as their identical size suggests, they were two components of a mural composition, a pendant pair. This suggests not only that they were decorative in nature, intended to engage the eye and the imagination, but also that they were complementary and intended to be read together – the stately ceremony deliberately contrasted with the ecstatic. That these paintings were intended to illustrate scenes from daily life



FIGURE 1.4. Panel painting of an Egyptian ritual, pendant to Plate 1, Herculaneum (first century CE).

Photo credit: Scala / Art Resource, NY.

is a supposition, however likely it seems. And we do not know if the scenes were to be understood as taking place in Italy or Egypt. The inclusion of a white-and-black ibis, the *threskiornis aethiopicus*, may suggest the latter.³⁵ I do not mean to suggest that these frescos could not serve as evidence for Egyptian rituals, or for idealized understandings of Egyptian ritual. But we cannot take them at face value without also thinking carefully about the conventions of fresco as a medium and their function as part of a private home's decor. When using artworks as evidence – whether for the nature of ritual in the cult of Isis, the place of native Egyptians in Roman culture, or even

changing ideas about the place and people of Egypt after conquest – we must examine them for their intended capacity to make a striking visual impact, and think explicitly about their purpose, production, and context.

Many of the artworks discussed in this book have a strong connection to the Italian cults of Egyptian deities, whether because they were dedicated in sanctuaries, represented the deities, or were perceived to possess an extraordinary apotropaic or other potency deriving from their Egyptian origins. But this book is not a work of religious history and does not purport to challenge the *communis opinio* about the nature of the Egyptian gods and their rituals. Its art historical emphasis offers a different but complementary point of view, bringing votive materials into a broader conversation, emphasizing issues of artistic production and the physical histories of art-objects, thereby illustrating how communities in Italy brought “Egypt” closer to home both literally and figuratively.

IMAGES OF EGYPT

Chapter 1, “Egyptian Objects, Roman Contexts: Appropriation and Aesthetics,” lays the foundation for my approach by looking at how Egyptian imports were incorporated into new settings, reconstructing their transmission through trade, and examining their relationship to works of local manufacture. Some of the examples I address are well known, others less so: wall-paintings from a cubiculum in a villa owned by Augustus’ grandson; an Egyptian alabaster vase, appropriated and reinvented by a member of the Roman elite as a funerary urn; a baboon representing Thoth signed by its artists. Throughout, I investigate cases in which we have good evidence from archaeological context or other sources – often epigraphic – that allow us to discuss the origin of the materials, the use to which they were put, or the identities of the artists who made them. Imported artworks were prized for their place of origin and accorded ritual potency, but they were also displayed in tandem with works of local manufacture and often treated similarly, whether modified, repaired, gilded, or otherwise tended. Egyptian-looking works, made in emulation, were created using the same techniques as were employed for sculptures and paintings in the capital city in all manner of styles and, indeed, were often made by the same artists.

Although the material evidence for Rome’s interest in Egypt is well-documented, it is nearly always discussed in isolation – as we ponder the evidence for the Egyptian cults in this location or that, or within the context of those historical periods when Egypt loomed large in the affairs of the emperor and the state. Make no bones about it, scholarship in this mode is both necessary and worthwhile, and it provides the solid ground for the present study and future investigations. But the result, however unwitting, is the segregation of these materials into a seemingly coherent, self-contained “genre” largely

of our own construction. In so doing, we close certain avenues of inquiry even as we explore others in lavish detail. In [Chapters 2](#) through [4](#), I demonstrate through a series of case studies the value of applying to *aegyptiaca* the same critical apparatus we employ for other works of art, arguing in essence for their integration into our practice of Roman art history. I situate both Egyptian imports and Italian-made emulations within contemporary modes of artistic and literary discourse, favoring close reading and critical argument over broad survey. I look at how Egyptian-themed artworks reflected the patronage of their owners; how contextual display conditioned the interpretation of unusual subject matter; and how the complex relationship between art and text informed their reception.

[Chapter 2](#), “Augustus’ Obelisks and the Spoils of Egypt,” is a patronage study, investigating the importation of two obelisks to Rome by Augustus in 10/9 BCE. Obelisks are enduring symbols of the spectacular feats of engineering and manpower for which Dynastic Egypt is famous, towering monoliths quarried and transported the length of the Nile at the behest of the Egyptian kings. So many were removed to Rome (and thereafter to Paris, London, and New York) that few remain in Egypt today. These monuments have come to stand as emblems of Roman imperial enterprise. I here focus on the first two obelisks brought to Rome and argue that scholarship has not taken sophisticated enough stock of their transplantation, in two key respects. First, we have so long taken them as representative of Augustus’ victories over his foreign enemy Cleopatra that we have failed to consider in full the historical context in which they were brought to Rome, two decades later. In the interim, Augustus and his emissaries had dealt with a number of border disputes and revolts in the newly conquered territories, and a strong interest in Egypt and its culture had developed at home. Second, the long-standing focus on the obelisks as symbols of conquest has eclipsed questions about their reception by contemporary audiences. Roman audiences were interested in their Egyptian symbolism, as they understood it, as reflective of a ruler’s ability to govern, expressing his relationship with the gods and people. In sum, I argue that Augustus’ obelisks showed him to have a special relationship with the Roman people and their gods, and celebrated the preeminence of Italy as favored by the native sun. Along with many other constructions, Augustus used the obelisks to showcase his continued patronage of Rome, showing that his city was not just a rival to famed Alexandria but had eclipsed it to become the political and cultural capital of the empire. In a number of respects, the “Egyptian” symbolism enhanced this “Roman” meaning.

In the [third chapter](#), I turn to a context decidedly more ordinary, exploring audience and reception. “The Sanctuary of Isis in Pompeii: Dedication and Devotion, Myth and Ritual” explores the way that dedications – gifts of structures, sculptures, and paintings – spoke to the ancient audiences that frequented the complex. The preservation of the site by the eruption

of Mount Vesuvius means that our evidence here is particularly rich. At the time of its discovery, the frescoed walls stood to the height of the first story, and many sculptures remained in their original locations. The excavators reported finding ritual deposits, lamps and sacred vessels, and even the skeleton of a man who had taken refuge there during the city's last hours. Although scholars have studied this site in depth, much has been overlooked. I begin by taking a fresh look at the epigraphic evidence from the sanctuary, treating it not as *sui generis* but as reflective of local votive and commemorative practices. Far from acting as a group apart, the cult members used the sanctuary as a stage for self-presentation in ways entirely consistent with community expectations. In the second half of the chapter, I shift to focus on one of the gifts in great detail, the mural paintings of the ekklesiasterion. The room's rich décor included two large-scale mythological paintings that recounted the story of the girl Io, following her through her unfortunate transformation by Jupiter into a cow and her triumphant return to human form, which took place on the banks of the Nile. Using literary and visual evidence, I suggest that these paintings were not tailor-made for the sanctuary setting but based on templates. Thus, they do not reflect a cult-specific understanding of Isis. Rather, the paintings appropriated a popular story in wide currency and adapted it to the ritual setting. In so doing, they conferred prestige upon the sanctuary's patron deity in ways that all visitors to the sanctuary could understand, while at the same time protecting her mysteries.

The [final chapter](#), "Images of Egypt: Land at the Limit of Belief," addresses the visual and textual discourse on Egypt directly, through extended discussion of two canonical representations of the place, the Vatican Nile and Juvenal's 15th satire. Both are more or less contemporary, dating from the reign of Hadrian. How Romans thought about Egypt is a topic that has occasioned much interest in recent years, as scholars have investigated issues of stereotyping, racism, and colonialism in the ancient context. Here, then, I put two examples through their paces, focusing on context in every sense – physical setting, authorial agenda, and the dialectic between art and text. The Vatican Nile did not embody a single vision of Egypt but rather brought a number of visual tropes into a conversation. Paired with the Tiber, this monumental sculpture invited viewers to think through the relationship between geography and culture in ways that stressed the positive. In contrast, Juvenal's description of Egypt appears to be pure invective. Juvenal begins the poem, which describes a conflict between residents living in two small towns, by invoking stereotypes about Egyptians and their barbaric customs so commonplace they seem to be fact. Yet as the poem moves towards its dramatic conclusion, an act of gruesome cannibalism, he slowly reveals the contradictions among these stereotypes and

preconceptions, in the service of a broader satire on the rigidity of philosophical thought and reasoning. In both cases, to treat the sculpture or text as transparently expressive of what Romans believed about Egypt and Egyptians does it a disservice, by treating their Roman contexts as irrelevant, their Egyptian meaning as uniform, and their creators as reporters, not artists.

1

EGYPTIAN OBJECTS, ROMAN CONTEXTS: APPROPRIATION AND AESTHETICS

How do we begin to make sense of the Roman taste for Egyptian and Egyptian-looking objects, which spanned centuries and encompassed all manner of materials? It is tempting to consider it a Classical-era Egyptomania, a neologism used to describe the emulation of Egyptian style in the decorative arts and the periodic waves of public interest spurred by new discoveries or investigations into the culture of ancient Egypt.¹ Certainly, ancient interest in the place and people of Egypt responded to current events, peaking after Augustus' annexation of the province, Vespasian's successful campaigns in the east (and declaration as emperor in Alexandria), and Hadrian's travels. The emperors celebrated Egypt's evolving place in the empire through public monuments, including obelisks, temples, and sculptures, which in turn stimulated display in the private sphere. Yet those living in Italy had long-standing and well-recognized ties with Egypt before Actium, and continued to collect and emulate Egyptian artworks for centuries after. These two places and cultures were brought into a number of conversations by the movement of goods and people throughout the Mediterranean and by the spread of Egyptian religions to all corners of the ancient world. Underlying the Egyptomania of modern periods is a desire to celebrate a lost ancient culture, to reveal it through excavation, to decode it through study. Although Roman interest in Egypt was antiquarian at times – as ancient authors debated the antiquity of different peoples or wrote histories that included ancient Egyptian kings – they did not experience Egyptian culture at the same remove.

I propose a new vantage point from which to examine the Roman taste for exotica, focusing on artworks of foreign and local manufacture as used and displayed in Italy – that is, placing primary emphasis on Roman contexts. This approach does not deny the utility of categories that describe artifacts by place of first manufacture (Egyptian, Egyptianizing), but stresses that these categories do not tell us everything about artworks' function, display, or reception. Put simply, these categories treat the moment of an object's initial creation as more essential than its ultimate use. In human terms, they

privilege the creator over the consumer. Terminology that categorizes by origin obscures how rich were the “biographies” of many of the artworks in question, which traveled from Egypt to Italy and were thereby reinvented. In many contexts, it is difficult to draw clear distinctions between the Egyptian and the Roman-made. Many Egyptian artifacts imported to Italy, for example, were reworked to suit them for their new settings, becoming something altogether new in the process. Some Roman-made artworks were designed to appear imported, complete with tailor-made hieroglyphic texts. Others simply adopted an Egyptian mien, abandoning the pretense that the work in question came from Egypt. Yet the authenticity of a work in Egyptian style or on an Egyptian theme did not derive exclusively from its place of origin. Authenticity stemmed from a work’s ability to convey certain kinds of Egyptian-ness to Roman eyes, regardless of who made it or where; the function of an artwork, the manner of its display, and the visual style in which it was executed were paramount.

My intent is not to offer a comprehensive survey of Egyptian imports or Roman-made *aegyptiaca*, for the corpus is extensive and this work is not intended to serve as a catalogue. Rather, I have selected examples for which inscriptions or archaeological context offer information that enables us to see how these materials were integrated into broader societal patterns of ritual, manufacture, and commerce. Throughout, I interrogate these objects to better understand the people involved, focusing on issues of identity and functional bilingualism, technique and contextual display. What patterns of trade brought Egyptian goods to Italy? Who made new artworks in Rome, and based on what models? Who could read or write hieroglyphic texts? And finally, what aesthetics² governed these displays? Close attention to the social engines of trade and artistic production emphasizes the agency of artists, patrons, and consumers of all stripes, while honoring the diversity of the material recognizable as Egyptian by Roman audiences.

THE RICHES OF EGYPT: TRADE, PRODUCTION, AND THE “EGYPTIAN” AESTHETIC

Imported artworks are the lasting testaments to a once thriving commerce between Egypt and Italy that encompassed a wide range of goods, including cereals and legumes, oil, wine, papyrus-paper (*charta*), precious metals, marbles, gems, perfumes, incense, medicines, and spices. It is impossible to estimate the number of artworks imported during any given period, or to calculate their cost to consumers upon purchase. Even to suggest that there was a sharp differentiation between markets in staple and luxury goods risks simplifying patterns of trade that merged local, regional, and pan-Mediterranean networks, within which environmental and social

factors affected the cost of, demand for, and availability of goods at any given time.³ At the same time, understanding the processes through which art objects made their way from Egypt to Italy serves as the foundation for answering questions about their religious function and decorative impact. It is important not to take the presence of imported material culture as a given; underlying each act of importation were several complex steps, carried out by many different agents in Egypt and in Italy, as the objects were selected, packaged, shipped, and eventually sold. These processes re-commodified the material, ascribing economic value and symbolic meaning to it according to the consumer's culture-specific systems of valuation. Though the monetary value of imported artworks is elusive, recognizing that imported objects were also commodities – akin to other imported luxury products – allows us to situate them within the increasingly cosmopolitan culture of Roman Italy in the first century CE and beyond, drawing on an elite discourse that cast Rome as the ultimate consumer city.

There were well-established trade networks connecting Egypt and Italy that predated annexation. Mediterranean societies had long prized raw goods of eastern origin, such as lapis lazuli and hippopotamus ivory, as well as faience materials of Egyptian manufacture. We can characterize the import trade before conquest as indirect, as materials moved from port to port and arrived in Italy after a series of intermediate transactions. As early as the eighth century BCE, Egyptian materials appear in sites throughout Italy, as far north as Vetulonia and as far south as Tarentum, with particular concentrations in Magna Graecia and the coastal regions of Campania, near the emporium of Pitheculsae. The earliest extant finds are grave goods, which were likely considered prestige items: small vessels, figurines, seals, and scarabs.⁴ Such indirect trade networks flourished for centuries. The rise of island port-cities, especially Rhodes and Delos, brought an increasing volume of eastern goods to Italy, including those that came from or through Alexandria. Pan-Mediterranean commerce also created diverse, multilingual, mobile populations of traders, resulting in the spread of the Egyptian cults to Campanian harbors.⁵ Egyptian products did not dominate these cargos, however; nor did the routes of Egyptian goods to Italy differ from those from other points of origin. Once in Italy, both imported foodstuffs and imported artifacts would be consumed (whether eaten, drunk, or used) according to the practices of the consumer, not the maker. A “Queen’s Vase,” an oinochoe inscribed with a formulaic prayer to Arsinoe II and said to be from a tomb in Canosa, illustrates how the culture-specific functions of goods were subject to change, as a ritual implement with a specific use became a generalized symbol of wealth.⁶ [Figure 1.1] Nor, indeed, did these patterns of trade solely bring goods to Italy. The so-called *liber linteus*, an Etruscan linen bookroll written in burnt ivory and cinnabar dating to the third century BCE, was found reused in Egypt in the cartonnage of a mummy. This case illustrates



FIGURE 1.1. Faience oinochoe or “Queen’s Vase” said to be from a tomb in Canosa, Italy (manufactured c. 220–200 BCE).

Photo credit: © Trustees of the British Museum.

that goods from Italy also made their way to Egypt and that these, too, were subject to similar processes of re-commodification and consumption.⁷

Long before Actium, then, shipping routes were extensive and reliable, reaching through Egypt as far as India. Rome’s direct involvement in Egypt’s political affairs in the late Republic shows how vital these networks had become in the period before annexation, but at this time the city in no way depended on Egypt for staple goods or foodstuffs. With the exception of a few diplomatic gifts or extraordinary sales of grain in times of particular hardship, the grain trade was an imperial phenomenon. There is evidence during the Republic, too, for an increasing variety of prestige products coming to Italy from or through Egypt. These still likely followed the place-to-place pattern of commerce. When Cicero defended Gaius Rabirius in 54 BCE against the charge that he had taken bribes from Ptolemy Auletes, the ships supposedly proving the malfeasance contained only Alexandrian cargoes (linen, glass, *charta*, and other luxury goods), suggesting that direct shipments were not the norm.⁸ It was after Actium that the city of Rome came to truly depend upon Egyptian grain and witnessed the influx of luxury goods in quantity. Many grain ships from Alexandria destined for Italy’s harbors were

enormous, behemoths defined by their capacity to carry up to 50,000 *modii* at a time. These large, specialized vessels joined fleets of smaller ships with diverse cargoes of eastern origin, whose contents were owned by many different merchants, bound for Roman markets.⁹ The evidence for intra-Egyptian and Red Sea trade shows that farther-ranging networks, in fact, did not much change after annexation. Material bound for Rome was still picked up port-to-port as traders moved along the same routes as before. Yet Roman emperors managed these networks by updating roads, improving canals, and adding military outposts, all with an eye to better enabling the taxation of the materials as they moved through Alexandria.¹⁰ From Alexandria, goods traveled more directly to Portus and Puteoli. Painted in broadest strokes, annexation changed trade patterns in a number of ways that benefited the economy of Roman Italy: greater quantities of both staple and luxury goods moved from Egypt to Italy; the government taxed goods as they moved through intermediary ports; local industries along the way increased the value of raw materials by refining them before they reached the capital's shops and vendors. As a result, the Roman consumer enjoyed access to a greater range of materials, still costly, but made more affordable because of increased volume and administrative efficiency. Exotic goods were no longer within the reach of only the wealthiest.

Hand in hand with the wider availability of all manner of luxury goods came an elite rhetoric that characterized Rome as the economic *caput mundi*. Pliny the Elder, on whose witness many discussions of Roman materials and commodities rests, explicitly ties quality of life to the expansion of empire and availability of goods. "For, with the entire world having been united by the majesty of the Roman empire, who thinks that life has not benefited from the commerce of things and the partnership of solemn peace, and that everything [has not benefited]. For even those things, which before had been inaccessible, are made of use without distinction?"¹¹ His discussions of value cast his reader as the consummate consumer, as he ranks the products of different places, always noting which is the best and periodically discussing price.¹² As Grant Parker and others have illustrated, eastern commodities became a flexible literary trope for luxury and excess, reflective of a perceived social value in Roman eyes that replaced and slowly effaced their power conceived purely in economic terms.¹³ Pliny's account, therefore, allows us to look beneath the surface-level picture of trade between Egypt and Italy.

Pliny includes Egyptian products often in his encyclopedia, indirectly sketching a commerce that included cereals and other foodstuffs, medicines, gems, marbles, linen, papyrus products, and antiquities.¹⁴ Some – especially those of best quality, highest price, or greatest decorative appeal – were valued in large part for their foreign origin, of which Pliny expects his readers to be aware. Pliny notes that many goods were renamed in honor of those who first brought them to Italy, an ascription of quality pegged to the political rank of

Rome's leaders. As an aside in his discussion of figs, for example, Pliny says there were excellent varieties named after Livia and Pompey, both of which were still grown under those names in Italy in his own day.¹⁵ The very names of goods, in other words, tied products to the reader/consumer's conception of the empire's history and expanse. This phenomenon is apparent in Pliny's discussion of the classes of decorative marble, among the most prestigious and widely exploited of Egypt's natural resources. He notes that Egypt was the source of a number of fine stones, including two discovered during the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius and so named "the Augustan" and "the Tiberian." He describes both as especially beautiful, the Augustan having serpentine markings and the Tiberian delicately mottled. Both are also the most expensive, *pretiosissimi*.¹⁶ Here, the origin, rarity, and novelty of the commodity, combined with the emperor's imprimatur, affected price and prestige. As Sorcha Carey has argued, Pliny's discussions of imported stones are part of a "narrative of conquest" that at once subjected the foreign to a conservative, moralizing discourse, while also valuing it as the physical proof of Rome's ability to control the resources of the world.¹⁷ When used for the first time in Rome under an emperor's rule, marbles symbolized his control of vast territories and his power to command that new and unknown treasures be brought to the capital. Archaeological evidence affirms Pliny's account. Stones quarried in Egypt in the Roman period, including rose and gray granite, diorite, porphyry, and alabasters, were used more frequently in the urban centers of the empire than in Egypt's own towns and cities.¹⁸

Not all Egyptian products, however, were recognizable as imported or appreciated solely on that basis. Alexandrian wheat, for example, was ubiquitous, necessary for feeding Italy's urban populations. Pliny nevertheless considers such everyday products noteworthy, based on his awareness that exploitation of Egypt's resources was of particular economic benefit to Rome, a result of dynamics in that region that kept labor costs particularly low. In his discussion of flax, used for linen, Pliny says that the plant grows in most regions of the Mediterranean basin. He mentions the varieties from Egypt not because they are of the best quality but because they bring the highest profit.¹⁹ The same holds true for vinegar made in Egypt, which was popular in Italy because it was a good, cheap choice.²⁰ Pliny also provides evidence that patterns of production changed in Egypt after annexation, as goods were prepared for wider scale exportation, sometimes supported by ceramic sub-industries for shipping. So, for example, he says that Egyptian natron – used as a medicine, preservative, and flux for glass production – was sealed up before shipment in specially made vessels to keep it from going bad.²¹ Again, archaeological evidence provides some confirmation of Pliny's account. Egyptian amphorae, primarily containing wine, first occur in Italy and the western provinces in statistically significant numbers beginning in the early first century CE.²² For other goods, archaeological

evidence attests to complicated chains of production, predicated on materials of Egyptian origin. Recent work on glass, for instance, suggests that factories in Egypt processed local silica into ingots, subsequently shipped and refined further into finished glass in secondary production centers throughout the empire.²³

On the whole, Pliny's picture of the place of Egyptian goods in Italian markets does not surprise. His Rome is an emporium in which anything is available, where a good can be found to suit every need; all manner of products from Egypt were deeply entwined in Roman commercial and consumptive life. Yet, when we press his information, patterns emerge that prove crucial to understanding the dynamics of the markets in luxury goods, including artworks. After annexation, subtle changes in production began to suit imported goods more specifically to Roman consumption, thus privileging the Roman cultural context. Many imported products arrived in urban centers in a state of incomplete production, either as raw materials or partly worked. Some were refined at intermediary ports like Alexandria. So, for example, Pliny writes that frankincense originated in Arabia but was processed into incense in Alexandria, where factories took extreme measures to ensure that none of the precious material was lost, even requiring workers to wear aprons with sealed pockets and conducting strip-searches to discover any hidden frankincense.²⁴ Textiles, gold jewelry, and perfumes were also refined in Alexandria from raw materials.²⁵ Gary Young argues that because fewer taxes were levied on raw materials, delaying and controlling the finishing of goods enhanced the profits for merchants and middlemen, who refined them after their arrival in major port cities (after taxes were assessed). Eventually, sub-industries like these, producing "Alexandrian" wares, moved to Italian soil – there were perfume-makers in Capua, for example.²⁶ On Pliny's witness, these market forces affected even the most emblematic Egyptian products. In his lengthy discussion of the papyrus plant, he notes that as early as the reign of Claudius, manufacturers of *charta* in Egypt began to manipulate the product so that it would better suit Roman uses – changing the length and size of the standard roll, for example. Eventually, workshops located in Rome began to produce their own *charta* by reprocessing imported low-grade material into a higher quality (and thus higher priced) product.²⁷

Pliny does not discuss the importation of Egyptian artworks directly, beyond a single aside in his discussion of a variety of porphyry called the *leptosephos* stone, known for its mottled appearance: "Vitrasius Pollio, the procurator, brought statues of this material to Claudius Caesar in the city [of Rome], not much approved for their novelty. Certainly no one afterwards imitated [him]."²⁸ Whether these artworks were new commissions or Egyptian antiques is not clear. In any case, the material record contradicts Pliny on this score; Romans used colored, imported marbles both as revetment for imperial structures and for many types of *Idealplastik*.²⁹ Even so, the patterns Pliny

outlines help explain both the taste for imported artworks after conquest and also their emulation by Italian artists.

The chains of production and transportation that brought eastern materials to Roman consumers, whether bound for the table, personal use, or domestic display, rested upon the choices, interests, and manipulations of a number of agents. Merchants and producers attempted to maximize their returns, and also tailored their wares to the expectations and tastes of the Roman consumer. The Egyptian origin of many goods, especially quotidian products like flax and wheat, was invisible. Conversely, Italy was the locus of production of some luxury wares that appeared to be foreign and, indeed, appealed to consumers on that basis. Above all, Pliny shows that the perceived difference between a local and an imported good was foundational to the cultural construction of value, even as the local/import dichotomy might not accurately capture the processes of production that introduced such goods into the Italian economy.

To see these various dynamics in play, let us look in some depth at a single case of an imported object, a vessel that first served as a votive offering in Egypt and then as a cinerary urn in Italy, considering how the Egyptian origin and function of the object informed its reuse in Rome. The vase stands just over two feet tall (66 cm) and is hewn from a single piece of calcite alabaster. [Figure 1.2a, b] It has a particularly rich biography. Inscriptions on both faces, one a hieroglyphic inscription dating to the ninth century BCE and the other a Latin inscription dating to the early first century CE, illuminate both its Egyptian and Roman lives. Much is known, too, of its post-antique history. The vase came to light “near the Theatre of Marcellus” in 1615. The Borghese family purchased it for a growing collection, and it was in the family’s hands for centuries. In 1808, it was acquired for the Musée Napoleon. Today, it remains in the Louvre’s department of Egyptian antiquities.³⁰ Even a brief history of the piece shows that it has played many parts in its time: offering, memorial, and *objet d’art*. Even more remarkable is that it can be connected with the ownership of identifiable individuals at a number of phases in its life, from creation to curation.

The hieroglyphic inscription on the front face states that the vase was a dedication made by a priest of Thebes named Nebneteru, given in honor of the king’s health and good fortune. The formulae describing the king suggest it was made either under Osorkon II (c.874–850 BCE) or Osorkon III (c.777–749 BCE).³¹ Nebneteru belonged to a family that could trace its genealogy through five generations – a prominent priestly family in Thebes in a charged time for relationships between the kings of Egypt and local elites.³² During the reign of Osorkon II, for example, a priest named Hariese declared himself to be the ruler of the region, attempting to eclipse the king’s authority, even constructing a royal tomb for himself at Medinet Habu.³³ Comparison with slightly later material suggests that such vases were prestige objects used in elite rituals of gift-giving, perhaps containing expensive unguents. One of

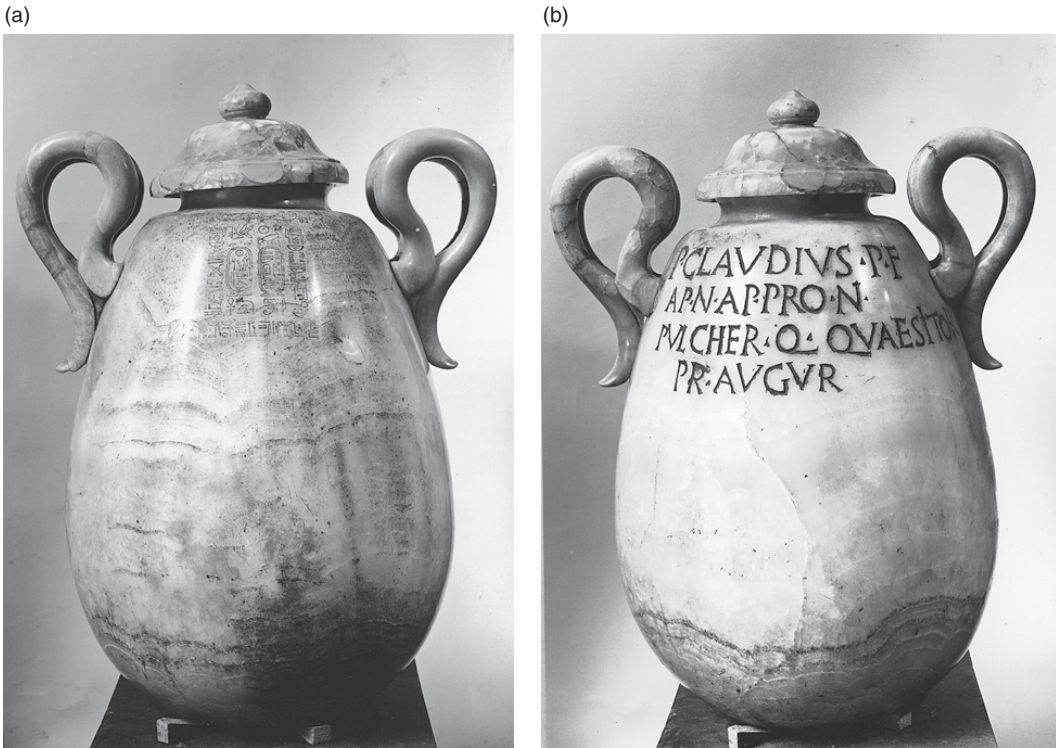


FIGURE 1.2a, b. Alabaster vessel with inscription of Nebneteru on recto, epitaph of P. Claudius Pulcher on verso (manufactured c. ninth or eighth century BCE; imported to Rome and reinscribed late first century BCE or early first century CE).

Photo credit: Musée du Louvre.

this size, moreover, would require a sizeable block of stone, likely imported from Egypt's eastern desert.³⁴ As an Egyptian object, then, this vase reflects a single individual's affirmation of the office of the king but also represents a show of that individual's own wealth and connections.

The vase came to Rome early in the Augustan period and was reused as a cinerary urn. Although our understanding of its findspot is not precise, it provides the best evidence for the family tomb of the Claudii, thought to be located near the *Templum Bellonae*.³⁵ To suit its new function, artisans outfitted the vase with a lid and two large handles of Italian alabaster (similar in appearance to calcite alabaster but lacking the same translucency and striation). A Latin inscription was added to the verso, identifying its owner with three generations of filiation:

Publius Claudius Pulcher, son of Publius, grandson of Appius, great-grandson of Appius. A quaestor, quaesitor, praetor, and augur.³⁶

P. Claudius Pulcher belonged to one of the most illustrious families of the late Republic. His father was Publius Clodius, Cicero's famed rival (tribune of the plebs, 58 BCE); his grandfather was Appius Claudius Pulcher (consul 54,

censor 51 BCE); his great-grandfather was Appius Claudius Pulcher (consul, 79 BCE).³⁷ Literary evidence allows us to flesh out his biography. After his father's death, P. Claudius Pulcher's mother married the triumvir Mark Antony, who betrothed his sister to Octavian to solidify their alliance, though the union was eventually annulled.³⁸ Cicero knew of him, too, and thought him a promising young man. For Valerius Maximus, his life was an exemplum of misspent youth; he makes reference to P. Claudius Pulcher's affair with a prostitute, leading to a shameful and horrible death by disease.³⁹ (The brief *cursus honorum* on his monument suggests a distinguished early career cut short, although not for what reason.) Two children survived him, including a son who rose to the consulship in 21 or 22 CE.⁴⁰ The case is all the more interesting, then, because P. Claudius Pulcher lived at a pivotal time in Rome's dealings with Egypt, though he was too young to have been part of the conflict between Octavian and Antony and Cleopatra.

How important was the object's Egyptian-ness to its later use? P. Claudius Pulcher's memorial would have made an impressive visual impact, for it is a large piece of especially fine striated stone. According to Pliny, the best alabaster was the color of golden honey and had pronounced whorls, and that from Egypt was considered good; Romans appreciated alabasters for their abilities to preserve their contents and for their appearance.⁴¹ Other similar examples give us some purchase on the social value of an object of this type. There are a few other extant Roman funerary urns of Egyptian calcite alabaster, including another reworked from an Egyptian import. Germanicus's young daughter Livilla was said to be buried in an alabaster urn, as was the emperor Septimius Severus.⁴² Although it might be tempting to read something into the overt appropriation of an Egyptian urn by Antony's son-by-marriage, this context suggests that the urn did not make a simple statement about its owner's political affiliations, which might otherwise seem a natural assumption. The modifications were expedient, creating a new functional object from recycled material. Placed within a niche in a tomb, the hieroglyphic inscription and the Egyptian fabrication of the object would have been invisible. At the same time, the urn made ostentatious use of a costly and luxurious material known to be from Egypt, later deemed worthy of the imperial family and certainly notable in early Augustan Rome. The Egyptian origin of the material was paramount, the place of its production, secondary. This example, then, showcases a work of *both* Egyptian and Roman manufacture. The same is true of many other imported artworks in Italy.

Most critical for the viewer or consumer of such works was the appearance of Egyptian origin, whether of material, as in this example, or of finished product. Acknowledgement of this primacy of appearance also helps us bridge the conceptual gap between the otherwise distinct categories of Egyptian import and Egyptian-like work of Roman manufacture: both were Roman cultural products and spoke to aesthetics that prized novelty and luxury. Italian-made

imitations of Egyptian artworks could be more than knock-offs, for actual origin could be less important than perceived origin. At the same time, the emergence of “populuxe” versions of costly goods slowly undermined the monetary and culturally constructed value of such luxuries.⁴³

A brief consideration of representations of Egyptian artifacts from Pompeian frescos reinforces this point. The shrine paintings from the House of the Gilded Cupids include what may be a representation of a shawabti figurine or canopic jar in a still-life of religious implements, along with what appears to be a statuette of a cobra, a sistrum, a *cista mystica*, and a patera. [Figure 1.3] All the assembled objects are intended to be ritually potent, regardless of putative origin. Imaginary Egyptian sculptures, however, also appear in garden paintings in which the interior rooms of a house were painted to simulate opulently decorated exterior space.⁴⁴ [Figure 1.4] A number of small finds from Pompeii confirm that the taste for the Egyptian exotic had trickled down to wealthier residents of the small city. A handful of Egyptian artifacts have been found in the city’s houses and in the Isis temple; a few homes included faience statuettes or glass figurines in Egyptian motifs in their gardens.⁴⁵ But these are rare and generally much smaller than the impressive statues depicted in the confected reality of the garden paintings. The representation of an imaginary imported statue in this context, therefore, communicated an aspiration, telegraphing a financial status and worldly taste belied by the economic reality of those living in the city of Pompeii.

In short, considering the process of commodification that brought such objects to Rome gives us some purchase on the “Egyptian” aesthetic following the conquest of Actium. It pushes our explanations beyond the simple, not least by revealing that Italy was not just a locus of distribution for luxury wares but also of production. What consumers wanted, it seems, were goods that appeared to be Egyptian, not just goods that came from Egypt. At the same time, however, to treat imported and Roman-made *aegyptiaca* primarily as symbols of the conspicuous consumption of the leisured classes does them a disservice. The alabaster urn of P. Claudius Pulcher, for example, was a memorial, serving a ritual function, holding and preserving his ashes, and acting as an emblem of the identity of the interred. “Meaning” in this case derived foremost from a culture-specific use. Many imported and Roman-made statues functioned similarly, incorporated into rituals or believed to embody the gods. It is to the range of contexts in which Egyptian-looking artworks have been found, from the profane to the profound, that we turn next.

EGYPTIAN IMPORTS IN ITALY

Egyptian objects brought to Italy found their way into a wide range of contexts. They were housed in temples; they graced the sculpture galleries of luxurious villas; they were displayed in private houses; they were interred in



FIGURE 1.3. Detail of a shrine painting from the House of the Golden Cupids in Pompeii (VI 16, 7), depicting cultic implements (mid-to-late first century CE).

Photo credit: Koppermann; Neg. D-DAI-Rom 63.1450.



FIGURE 1.4. Detail of a garden painting from the House of the Fruit Orchard in Pompeii (I 9, 5), showing an Egyptian statue holding an ankh and staff (mid-first century CE).

Photo credit: Koppermann; Neg. D-DAI-Rom 64.2265.

tombs. The largest and most magnificent pieces are associated with the city of Rome, but Egyptian artworks were available to those living outside the capital city. The largest assemblages come from sanctuaries to the Egyptian gods, including the sanctuary of Isis in Pompeii, the Iseum and Serapaeum Campense in Rome, and the sanctuaries in Beneventum and Cumae. In these

settings, Egyptian imports helped create an atmosphere that alluded to the homeland of the Egyptian gods, where they were often treated as sacred. Yet not all imports were accorded ritual significance. There were assemblages of Egyptian sculptures from the Horti Sallustiani, and examples are known from more modest homes in Pompeii and Herculaneum.⁴⁶ In non-cultic contexts, they were treated more like *objets d'art*. Faced with this diversity of material, it is natural to ask what Romans in Italy took these artworks to mean. What types of artworks did they collect, and why?

Romans living in Italy were drawn to pieces with iconography or texts that drew on Egypt's Pharaonic past or spoke of its customs. Yet beyond this, it is difficult to identify patterns in the materials except in a broad sense. Katja Lembke's careful study of the finds of the Iseum and Serapaeum Campense, for example, reveals a preference for basalt and granite works over sandstone or limestone, and shows that materials with hieroglyphic text were preferred to un-inscribed works.⁴⁷ Lorena Sist has pointed out that sphinxes and lions are numerous in Italian sanctuaries.⁴⁸ Anne Rouillet's 1972 catalogue, broken down by categories, confirms the popularity of zoomorphic sculptures, including falcons, lions, baboons, and sphinxes; other common types included obelisks, anthropomorphic gods, and representations of kings and queens.⁴⁹ More recent compendia illustrate the numeric extent of the surviving corpus: Olga Lollio Barberi and her colleagues identified sixty-three extant Egyptian works in major museums and private collections that were found within Rome.⁵⁰ When it comes to the issue of what these artworks and artifacts *meant* in their new Roman contexts, however, we must tread carefully. Taken altogether, the taste for antique works that were emblematically Egyptian is manifest. Yet this taste expressed interest in an "Egypt" of their new owners' making. These constructed visions of Egypt varied from context to context, genre to genre; they were neither uniform nor mutually consistent.

In her seminal treatment, Rouillet noted one important but puzzling fact about the corpus of Egyptian antiquities in Rome: the majority dated to Egypt's Late Period, and certain kings were disproportionately represented, namely Psametik II (r. 595–589 BCE), Nectanebo I (r. 379/378–361/360 BCE), and Nectanebo II (r. 359/358–342/341 BCE). Rouillet suggested that these kings had been mythologized in later historical periods, perhaps equated in some way with Osiris.⁵¹ This is certainly possible, as a king called Nectanebo figured into the Alexander Romance, and some curse tablets invoke an Egyptian king of similar name.⁵² Implicit in Rouillet's view, however, is that these objects (and others) were collected deliberately on the basis of this association. To ground this assumption, she hypothesized Egyptian intermediaries, "able to maintain links between the old pharaonic land and the Roman Empire outside, perhaps charged to order statues and reliefs for the European temples, certainly responsible for drafting of hieroglyphic texts of Roman obelisks."⁵³ As discussed later in this chapter, there were some highly educated Egyptian priests

and intellectuals with knowledge of hieroglyphic writing resident in the city of Rome, who composed new texts or aided in translations. It is unlikely, however, that such interpreters were common, and there is no evidence of their involvement in a specialized art trade. It may rather have been the case, as Rouillet herself acknowledged, that these kings are represented frequently because their monuments were numerous and readily accessible.⁵⁴ Heavily plundered sites, such as Heliopolis, figure disproportionately in the corpus.⁵⁵

The reigns of the last Egyptian pharaohs saw intense monumental campaigns in the Nile Delta, making the region a trove of sculptures, reliefs, and other materials. The cities of the Delta were focal points of conflict after the Late Period, as first the Persians, then the Greeks, and finally the Romans moved into Egypt with military intent. All left their mark on the monumental landscape. The Persians, for example, deliberately removed the names of Late Period kings from monuments and temples, toppled obelisks in Heliopolis, and also took away a number of artifacts as spoils for the treasuries of Susa and Persepolis.⁵⁶ As the underwater excavations of Fort Qaitbay have shown, the Ptolemies, too, moved artworks from throughout Egypt to the new capital in Alexandria, there perhaps serving as decoration for the city's museum, libraries, and palace.⁵⁷ The Romans were therefore the inheritors of long-standing traditions in which conquerors manifested their control of Egypt through the manipulation of its preexisting material culture, whether by reinstalling monuments in new locations within Egypt, removing the names of Egyptian kings, or carting materials away to their capital cities. (Nor were all such acts destructive; there is evidence that the Late Period kings and priests attempted to repair older structures or to house representations of deities by affixing canopies into ancient reliefs to shade them.⁵⁸) Many artworks in Rome bear the traces of complex histories and multiple interventions. A sphinx of Amasis II (r. 570–526 BCE) from the Iseum Campense, for example, exhibits what is likely deliberate Persian destruction: the erasure of the cartouche and damage to the face. In Rome, efforts were undertaken to repair the damage, with additional cuttings done to refit the sphinx for a new nose.⁵⁹ [Figure 1.5] The myriad artworks appropriated by the Romans thus had long biographies, often including multiple post-Egyptian and pre-Roman afterlives; they came to Italy having been removed from secondary or even tertiary contexts. This fact renders all the more unlikely the hypothesis that Romans or theoretical interpreters knew their origins or functions. The obscurity of the Egyptian histories of these artworks does not, however, rob them of their significance; rather, it presses us to attend especially to their new contexts in Italy, which can tell us much.

Material from Pompeii again serves as a case in point. A handful of Egyptian pieces were found in the early excavations, though for many we lack context because the objects immediately found their way to private collections.⁶⁰ For a precious few, however, we have information that provides vital purchase



FIGURE 1.5. Sphinx of Amasis II associated with the Iseum Campense, with evidence of damage and repair (manufactured Twenty-Sixth Dynasty, 570–526 BCE; imported to Rome, first or second century CE).

Photo credit: Archivio Fotografico dei Musei Capitolini.

on the relationship between reuse and reconceptualization. For example, a *mensa sacra*, an Egyptian inscription recording a dedication by Psametik II to Atum, was reused as a threshold block in the house of the Double Lararium in Pompeii. Its use there may evoke symbolic power, if the script were visible or if the object were deemed to have special properties by those who chose to use it in this location, but it does so in ways that draw upon Roman notions of space and place. The *limen* or threshold was a critical juncture of exterior and interior in Roman dwellings. According to Augustine, Romans invoked at least three deities to safeguard it.⁶¹

Similarly, the three known objects from the Temple of Isis in Pompeii illustrate the process of reconceptualization in action. The excavators found one, described as an “idolo egizio,” in the so-called sacrarium; its association with this room, where other finds included a cache of sacrificial implements, strongly suggests that it had at least a generalized ritual significance.⁶² For the others, we can say even more. The inscription of Semtawy-Tefnakhte, discussed at greater length



FIGURE 1.6. Ushabty of Paef-Hery-Hesu from the sanctuary of Isis, Pompeii (manufactured Late Period, 664–525 BCE; imported to Pompeii, first century CE).

Photo credit: Ministero per i Beni e la Attività Culturali – Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei.

in the [Introduction](#) [[Figure 1.3](#)], was entirely reworked for the Roman setting, planed from its statue to serve as decorative facing for a statue base. This act did not diminish its importance. The inscription and statue stood in the direct line of sight of anyone viewing the temple head-on, augmenting the display of the statue located above it, now lost. Although not literally intelligible to most viewers, the hieroglyphs proclaimed the cult's connection with the homeland of its patron goddess. Perhaps the most telling case of all is the ushabty of Paef-Hery-Hesu. [[Figure 1.6](#)] It was found buried beneath the floor level of the portico, interred with remains of food offerings. As an Egyptian object, this type of figurine formed part of an individual's investment in the afterlife, inscribed with its owner's name and a selection of the book of the dead; it was intended to serve the owner in the hereafter, and to do so it needed to remain intact. As a Roman object, it was *used* in ritual – in the view of Federico Poole, broken after it was burnt.⁶³ This case is not unique; there are other examples of Egyptian imports deliberately interred or damaged in ritual.⁶⁴

It is common to find traces of reworking on Egyptian artworks imported to Rome. In fact, some were so heavily restored that they became, in essence, entirely new physical works. For example, one composite Isis paired a body of Ptolemaic date with a Late Period head. [Figure 1.7a, b, c] This piece has a particularly long post-antique biography, rendering its Roman origin obscure. It is listed in the Louvre inventory as belonging to the Albani collection, and was almost certainly seized by the French in 1789. Today it is housed in the Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst in Munich, head and body accessioned as two different objects.⁶⁵ At best guess, however, the statue was repaired and assembled to form a new whole in antiquity. Mismatched heads and bodies were often joined in Roman artistic practice for reasons of aesthetics and economic expedience – evident in the practice of reusing generic bodies for portrait heads, but also for works considered masterpieces. Pliny describes a splendid composite Diana put on display in the Apollo temple on the Palatine; the body was the work of a Greek sculptor, Timotheos; the head was created by a Roman artist, C. Avianus Evander.⁶⁶ In this case, we may tentatively consider the Isis to be a pastiche of Roman creation. The recutting of the neck is consistent with ancient workmanship. The head also features a repaired nose. The sculpture was still whole when Adolf Furtwängler published the holdings of the Glyptothek, where the work was then housed.⁶⁷ The head in his illustration appears disproportionately small, and the union of a male head and female body seems dissonant. From a museological perspective, these pieces may be more interesting (and more valuable in a collection) understood as belonging to two different artifacts, one Ptolemaic and one Late Period, both Egyptian. As presented to Roman viewers, however, the mixed sculpture was more than the sum of its parts, which were suited in style, color and approximate size.

An alabaster canopic jar today in the Museo Gregoriano Egizio of the Vatican associated with the Iseum Campense provides another example of remaking. In this case, the head is Egyptian, likely of the Late Period. [Figure 1.8] It was placed upon a body of Roman manufacture, decorated with hieroglyphic text and representations of two lions. The text is legible (though inexpert in the opinion of Guiseppe Botti and Pietro Romanelli) and appears to have been excerpted and copied from a monument dedicated in honor of Nectanebo I, also imported to Rome.⁶⁸ In this case, the new object was likely created to be functional, perhaps a representation of Osiris; the modifications would have enhanced its new ritual function. The monolithic granite columns of the Iseum Campense show officiants carrying similar objects as if they are cult statues; similarly, the priest in one of the Herculaneum frescos holds what may be a similar object. [Figure I.4]

Taken as a group, these examples illustrate some of the many ways that Egyptian imports were altered to suit Roman settings, whether broken or repaired, re-sized or refitted. Even acts of damage constructed new meaning.

(a)



(b)



(c)



FIGURE 1.7a, b, c. Composite Isis, and details of its head and body as currently displayed, comprised of two different imported Egyptian artworks. Head (Late period, 664–525 BCE) and body (Ptolemaic period, 323–30 BCE).

Photo credit 1.7a: Furtwängler 1903, 5

Photo credit 1.7b, c: author, courtesy Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst München.



FIGURE 1.8. Alabaster canopic jar associated with the Iseum Campense. Head (Late Period, 664–525 BCE) and body (Roman imperial period, first to third centuries CE).

Photo credit: Foto Musei Vaticani.

Any change made to the object, so long as it was done deliberately, could enhance the symbolism and function of Egyptian artworks in their Roman settings. Even as these objects were desirable because they were Egyptian and exotic, their “meaning” derived from their integration into preexisting local decorative and ritual practices. By way of further illustration, let us look again at a case in depth, an example whose history allows us to follow a single artwork through many phases of its life, addressing its appropriation, reuse, and eventual deposition.

In 1909, French archaeologists led by Paul Gauckler discovered a black basalt Egyptian statue, dating to the Late or Ptolemaic period, during their excavations of the so-called Syrian Sanctuary or *Lucus Furrinae* on the Janiculum.⁶⁹ [Figure 1.9] As it stands today, the work has been reconstructed in its entirety from eight large fragments. It represents a king, wearing a kilt and a nemes headdress with a uraeus; the eyes were inlaid in a different material. At some point after its creation, holes were drilled into the hands to fit the work to hold attributes, in the process removing what had been,



FIGURE 1.9. Statue of pharaoh (reconstructed) from the Syrian Sanctuary on the Janiculum, Rome (Late Period [?], 664–525 BCE, with late Roman modifications).

Photo credit: Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali – Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma.

according to Egyptian artistic convention, the depiction of negative space between the palms.⁷⁰ It is associated with a complicated phase of the sanctuary's history, just before its eventual abandonment in the mid-to-late fourth century CE. [Figure 1.10] In Christophe Goddard's recent interpretation of the late antique strata, the suite of rooms had come to function as a semi-private shrine, perhaps to Osiris. There were a number of deliberate deposits in the floor. One contained a statuette and food offerings [Figure 1.11], another held seven of the eight fragments of the pharaoh. The eighth fragment was found in a layer of fill nearby. A third deposit contained a statue of Dionysus.⁷¹ [Figure 1.12] The Dionysus was interred whole, but was also an antique, dating to the second century CE. This piece, too, had been physically altered in a number of ways. One hand had been replaced with a new appendage with a hole bored to hold an attribute. The cranium had been split and slightly hollowed, and the face and hands of the piece had been gilded.⁷² This tailored the piece to late antique aesthetics but also likely emphasized

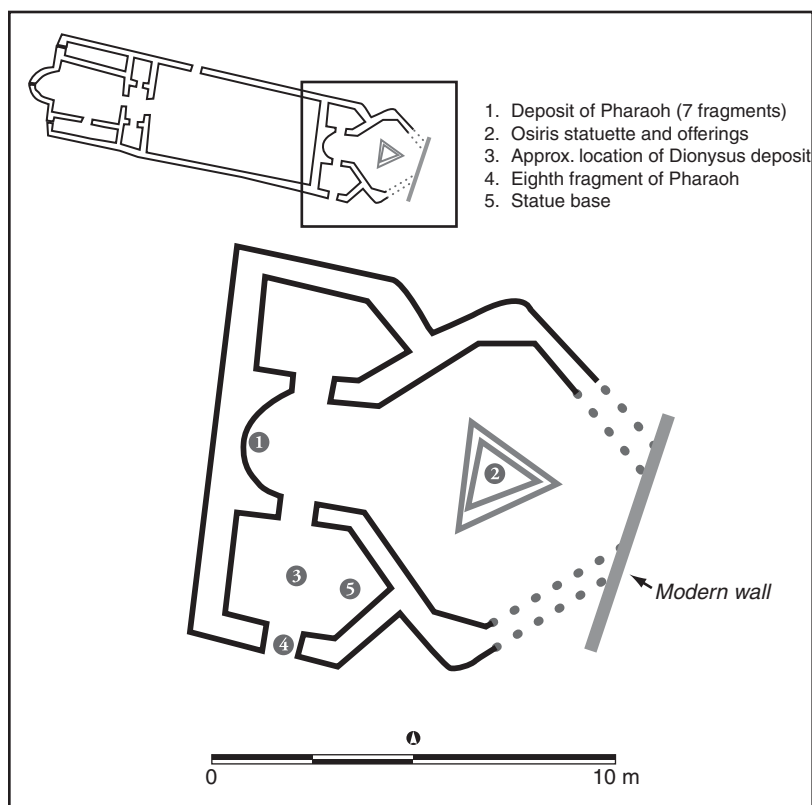


FIGURE 1.10. Plan of the Janiculum sanctuary with findspots of the sculptures marked. Drawing credit: Karen Rasmussen, Archeographics (modified from Goddard 2008, Fig. 1).

the nature of the deity as understood to those who put it on display in their sanctuary.

The wealth of this context allows us to sketch a picture of the last days of the cult, in which artworks mediated religious experience. According to the excavators, the damage to the pharaoh was the result of a Christian suppression of the sanctuary, during which the statue was torn down and hacked into large fragments. Although there are areas of particular damage to the face and head, the surface otherwise maintains a high sheen and polish, lending credence to the view that the damage was not the result of natural wear. In the excavators' view, the statue was thereafter interred by the members of the cult, attempting to preserve their cultic treasures from further harm.⁷³ It is possible, however, that the statue was broken by those who venerated it, as was the ushabty from Pompeii. In either case, the careful interment of the broken statue can be construed as ritual action, undertaken to maintain and secure its potency.

The remains from the sanctuary on the Janiculum are best considered within their own particular historical context, testament to a period in Rome



FIGURE 1.11. Gilded “idol” of Osiris from deposit 2 on [Figure 1.10](#) (Roman or Late Roman).

Photo credit: Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali – Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma.

when the political and religious landscape was changing, and in which the reuse of older sculptures was both a matter of aesthetics and legal necessity.⁷⁴ Yet in all periods, whatever significance was attributed to imports, sacred or secular, derived from local practice. Though few, the rare examples for which we have good information on context – the Temple of Isis in Pompeii, the scattered finds from the Palaestra at Herculaneum, the *aediculum* on the Esquiline – point to this same conclusion.⁷⁵ What this example illustrates with particular clarity is not just that an Egyptian import could be deemed sacred, but that in the investiture of ritual significance, its owners treated it in just the same way they did other cult statues of different styles and origins. In this case, both the pharaoh and the Dionysus had been reworked to suit a cult’s needs before their deposition, and were thereafter interred in much the same ways.

As the foregoing discussion demonstrates, there is no single story to tell about the importation of Egyptian artworks into Italy. The appropriation of Egyptian goods imbued them with value to Italians in multiple senses, as



FIGURE 1.12. Statue of Dionysus from the Syrian sanctuary on the Janiculum (manufactured c. second century CE, with late Roman reworking and gilding).

Photo credit: Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY.

emblems of political authority, totems of religious power, and signifiers of elite social status. While there is no one discernible pattern in the types of materials selected, there are patterns to how imports were treated once they reached Italian shores: a great many were reworked, altered in one way or another. Some were repaired; some refitted; some burnt; some broken. Above all, their significances derived from integration into existing artistic and ritual contexts and culturally determined modes of interpretation, even if such integration at times took the form of “destruction.” Some, if not all, of this secondary manufacture occurred in Italy. In the case of the statue from the Janiculum, for example, the need to refit the statue for the attachment of attributes met a location-specific need. Similarly, the reworking of the alabaster urn from the Iseum Campense was done by artists resident in the city, able to study and copy the hieroglyphic text of another imported monument.

I do not mean to suggest, however, that Romans in Italy did not differentiate at all between imported antiquities and Egyptian-seeming artworks created in Italy. Those objects and artifacts brought across the Mediterranean

from Egypt represented significant expense, and clearly some such works were accorded a unique ritual significance because of their place of origin. Yet both reworked imports and newly made emulations were produced in whole or in part by artisans resident in the capital who tailored them to meet the needs and desires of Roman patrons. Further, both were often displayed together, side by side, their similar treatment implying that they bore the same kind of meaning, if not always bearing the same overall monetary or ritual value. This in mind, let us turn from pieces of Egyptian origin to look at Roman-made works in Egyptian styles.

EGYPTIAN MONUMENTS, MADE IN ITALY

There were a great many artworks in Roman Italy that emulated Egyptian imports. To distinguish them, we call them alternately Egyptianizing, *Egyptiana*, or *aegyptiaca*, terms that characterize them by perceived style and place of origin. These works are not from Egypt, but employ Egyptian language, iconography, technique, or materials. In the past, scholars theorized that the highest quality emulations must have been the products of colleges of Egyptian artists and priests resident in Rome. Anne Rouillet, for example, thought that only such artisans would have been equipped by training and experience to deal with hard stones, work in exotic styles, or produce adequate facsimiles of Egyptian works.⁷⁶ More recently, Katja Lembke, joined by others, has argued cogently that Egyptian-looking monuments from Rome reflect both Egyptian and Roman methods of artistic production.⁷⁷ I take this conclusion as my point of departure, investigating which specialized skills were required to make new artworks in Italy. It is problematic to assume a one-to-one relationship between artistic style and the identity or ethnicity of the artist(s) who produced the work; the one is not evidence of the other. Beyond doubt there were Egyptians – that is, people who emigrated from the province of Aegyptus – in Rome. Yet we must think about their involvement in the creation of new monuments sensitively, acknowledging how complex were processes of identification in antiquity.⁷⁸ And artists were not the only agents involved in the production of such works. Patrons of a wide range of backgrounds and social classes commissioned and dedicated the pieces, and certainly exerted some control over their design and content.

A small number of monuments from Rome and its environs bear hieroglyphic texts created *de novo*, and on this basis it is fair to assume that people from Egypt were involved in their creation. Knowledge of the script was limited in the Roman period to practitioners in relatively small and self-contained communities in Egypt. All such monuments are obelisks, ranging in size and preservation.⁷⁹ The best known stands today in the Piazza Navona. [Figure 1.13] Domitian commissioned it, perhaps to commemorate his reconstruction of the Iseum Campense after the fire of 80 CE. The nature of the



FIGURE 1.13. Piazza Navona obelisk (after 81 CE).

Photo credit: author.

text, as well as the monument's form and style, signals that the obelisk was carved in Rome. It has a decidedly slender profile and stands to 16.54 meters.⁸⁰ The text proclaims that the obelisk was a dedication made by Domitian in honor of his divine father, Re-Harakhti, a traditional incarnation of the sun god associated with the rise of the sun at dawn. In a number of other ways, however, the text runs counter to convention and employs unusual language. Domitian's cartouche deviates from the way it was rendered on temples in contemporary Egyptian contexts, which suggests its author was following a variant protocol.⁸¹ The text mentions both Titus and Vespasian as gods (perhaps thus characterizing them as something similar to *divi*) and refers to the rebuilding of a monument, presumed to be the Iseum, after a disaster. Where most Egyptian obelisks would claim to reflect their benefits upon Egypt's two lands, Domitian's recites that it will bring benefit "to those who live in the time of the Flavians," expanding the scope of its bounty to include Rome. Ancient writers famously relate that Domitian considered himself to be *dominus et deus*, and this monument may perhaps present him in accordance with that wider self-image.⁸² In the view of both Jean-Claude Grenier and

Katja Lembke, the obelisk manipulates long-standing Egyptian formulae to embody a more contemporary, political force in Rome.⁸³

That an emperor such as Domitian should be able to requisition a sizeable monolith and to command those with specialized Egyptian knowledge to aid in its creation should not surprise. Yet elites living outside of the capital, too, commissioned a number of works with new hieroglyphic texts, though these works are little known and studied. A small number of votive obelisks from Italy feature such made-to-order texts. The most complete are from Beneventum, but there were probably others. Four fragments are known – today in Naples, Munich, and Palestrina – of what seem to have been two small obelisks either dedicated to the emperor Claudius or set up in his honor, by a man named Sextius Africanus. One of the fragments can be relatively securely associated with the town center of ancient Praeneste, found near the basilica and lower terrace (better known as the location of the Nile and Fish mosaics).⁸⁴ Interestingly, a second fragment with identical text came to light in Rome during the construction of the Torre dei Conti, near the ancient Forum Transitorium. Although we can only conjecture as to the place of its original display, it may have come from the area of the imperial fora, the *Templum Pacis*, or from the *Aedes Telluris*.⁸⁵ Here we have a suggestive example of a single dedicator presenting what we must assume were multiple votive obelisks in the emperor's honor in different locations. The dedications seem to be connected with the imperial cult, as well as with the cult of Isis. Yet because the text is poorly preserved, the case prompts more questions than it can answer. Were these monuments made in Italy or Egypt? Was the text composed and the monument carved by the same artisans or craftsmen? What function did the dedications serve? To find answers, we must turn to other evidence from both Italy and Egypt.

Enough text remains from the Beneventum obelisks that we can investigate these questions and further set the monuments within a decorative and epigraphic context. [Figure 1.14] The sanctuary of Isis from Beneventum appears to have been one of the largest outside the city of Rome, attested by a rich assemblage of Egyptian and Egyptian-themed sculptures. All reconstructions of the plan of the Iseum, however, are speculative. The extant materials were either reused nearby or found in a post-classical midden deposition outside the city walls.⁸⁶ Yet sufficient epigraphic information allows us glimpses of local practices of votive dedication. The first inscription associated with this context, though fragmentary, appears to chronicle the reconstruction of the cella of a temple to Isis and Serapis.⁸⁷ The second comes from a statue base dating to the mid-second century CE. It was set up by the *collegium martense infraforense*, an association of retired soldiers, in honor of a town potentate, C. Umbrius Eudrastus. This inscription seems to confirm the sanctuary's location in the heart of the ancient city, near the forum, and reflects the involvement of a powerful and well-connected family in its affairs. The



FIGURE 1.14. Beneventum obelisk, Piazza Paolo Emilio Papiniano (88 or 89 CE).

Photo credit: Justin Prinzbach.

inscription states that Umbrius Eudrastus paid for a canopus with his own money.⁸⁸ As do most Latin inscriptions, this reflects the *do ut des* calculus of euergetism that drove civic affairs. Further, it shows that different individuals took credit for different parts of the structure, and that the names for spaces within the sanctuary were both traditional (cella) and exotic (canopus), referring to Egypt's sacred landscape.⁸⁹

The complete obelisk stands roughly 3 meters tall, today located in the Piazza Papiniano of Beneventum. The dedicatory text proclaims the obelisk a gift honoring Domitian, giving thanks for his safe return from a military campaign, usually interpreted as his Dacian victories.⁹⁰ The monument places special emphasis on the role of the dedicator. It includes his name on three of the four sides and states that he, Rutilius Lupus, paid for the monument. Each side presents a different text. The text on what is understood to be the rear face reads: "To Great Isis, mother of the God, Sothis, Ruler of the gods, Lord of heaven and earth and the underworld. The legate of the Augustus with the beautiful name of the immortal Domitian, Rutilius Lupus erected for her and the gods of his city of Beneventum, this obelisk, that long life in happiness

may be granted him [i.e., the emperor].”⁹¹ Based on this text, it is clear that the author was multilingual, with proficiency in Egyptian, Greek, and Latin. It is possible – though difficult to prove – that the text was first written in Latin or Greek and subsequently translated.⁹² The text renders the names of people and places phonetically, true to their Latin sounds, and it translates concepts for which there is no Egyptian equivalent descriptively, so that the legate is “the one who runs back and forth for the emperor,” for example. Finally, the text acts on a visual level, using a character resembling a recumbent wolf within the name of Rutilius Lupus.⁹³

The richness of this example brings us closer to answering some of the questions posed earlier. Although composed in a foreign script, the monument also fits with Italian epigraphic conventions, placing stress on the patron of the monument and elucidating the source of its funding. The references to current events and places suggest that the text was composed in Italy, specifically for this site and its patron by a person with specialized knowledge of the hieroglyphic script. Does that evidence suffice to prove that “colleges of Egyptian priests and artists” were responsible? The answer is complicated. The creation of the Beneventum obelisks involved a number of people, including the Roman patron who commissioned them, the author(s) who wrote the text, and the artists who executed the design. For reasons that will become clear, we can safely conclude that the latter two were almost certainly not the same persons. Setting aside for later the vexed question of whether any of the artists were Egyptian by birth or ethnicity, we can focus for now on the likely background of the person responsible for producing the hieroglyphic script, investigating the skills and functional literacy required to compose a new text.

To understand the use of the hieroglyphic script in Italy, we have to begin by thinking about Egypt. Roman rule brought about a number of changes in religious language use in the province of Aegyptus.⁹⁴ Oracles, for example, issued in Demotic Egyptian through the Ptolemaic period, were from early in the first century CE more usually given and received on ostraka written in Greek.⁹⁵ The hieroglyphic script was still employed for ritual and monumental purposes; it was appropriate for sacred contexts and for inscriptions carved onto temples, where the text was both decorative and efficacious. As in all periods of Egyptian history, it was intended to be read in a literal sense only by a limited class of scribes and priests. Only a few contemporary documents speak to the process of education in writing and reading hieroglyphic texts, and these suggest increasing specialization. Two such sources date to the first century CE, one a papyrus on which a scribe practiced copying hieroglyphs in pen, and another a fragmentary dictionary.⁹⁶ In 107 CE, a group from Oxyrrhynchus that designated themselves *hieroglyphoi* (ἱερογλύφοι), either scribes or professional hieroglyph carvers, made an official declaration to Roman officials, apparently in response to legislation monitoring guilds, swearing that there were only five men in their group and stating that they

had no apprentices and that there were no other practitioners of the art.⁹⁷ The *hieroglyphoi* comprised two sets of brothers representing two distinct families, suggesting that the teaching of the skill in this community was in some way hereditary. The script remained in use until the fourth century CE, when a priest engraved a cartouche on the walls at Philae, the last documented attestation of the language,⁹⁸ but its practice was regionalized, vibrant in some places and nearly extinct in others. John Baines notes that in some places, such as Thebes, the script remained vital for both religious and funerary ritual.⁹⁹ Yet papyri with hieroglyphic characters form only a minority of extant sacred writings associated with known temple libraries, such as those of Tebtunis in the Fayum.¹⁰⁰

Visual evidence shows that training in the carving of hieroglyphic text also changed under Roman rule. Heike Sternberg-el Hotabi has investigated the evolution of a specific category of inscribed monument, “Horus-on-the-crocodiles” stelae, from the Late to the Roman periods. These stelae were prestigious dedications of hard stone, with images of Horus and magical formulae. They were ritually potent: worshippers touched them or drank water that had been poured over them to receive blessings or other benefits. Sternberg-el Hotabi notes that over time their production changed, so that increasingly the inscriptions were comprised of clusters of legible text joined with fanciful characters. Nevertheless, the quality of carving and artistic representation remained high. In her view, as the script slowly fell from widespread use, it became symbolic, emblematic of traditional thought and culture but no longer conveying specific linguistic content. While hieroglyphic characters remained important, their visual form and function became elevated above their literal meaning.¹⁰¹ A further implication of her study is that the artists who carved the stelae were not involved in text-production – that is, the artists were not themselves versed in reading or writing the hieroglyphic script. There was no correlation, then, between literal legibility and quality. The stelae remained ritually potent, and the artists were masters of their craft, even as language use shifted in response to social change.

Only against this backdrop can we envision the production of votive obelisks and other monuments bearing the hieroglyphic script in Italy. The tailor-made texts on the Piazza Navona and Beneventum and Praeneste monoliths provide incontrovertible evidence that some individuals in Italy possessed the most specialized form of training in the hieroglyphic script, the ability to create new meaningful texts. Although their word choice and protocols for naming the emperors differed from those employed on contemporary monuments in Egypt, these authors were highly competent. This fact suggests the presence in Rome of some priests trained in Egypt, or students trained by them in Italy. Though rare, there is other evidence for priests of Egyptian origin resident in Rome, such as an inscription set up in honor of a priest named Embes, whose cultic titles were both *prophetes* and *pater*. His unusual name,

the use of Greek language, and the fact that the inscription uses the Egyptian calendar for dates suggest a man from Egypt.¹⁰² Yet these testimonia must be considered critically and should not be taken as an indication that priests from Egypt were common in Italian communities.

A difference between the modern and ancient uses of the adjective “Egyptian” as an indicator of ethnicity, identity, or origin adds to the potential for confusion. Often, we use the word to refer to any person born in Aegyptus or from the place, but in the Roman period, Egyptian had a different and less neutral charge. Although literary sources attest to the presence in Italy of persons born in Egypt, especially slaves, epigraphic evidence does not reveal many people self-identifying as Egyptian in Italy.¹⁰³ In one respect, the dearth of epigraphic evidence for Egyptians in Rome is not surprising. Even in Roman-controlled Egypt, the label Egyptian did not simply identify an individual’s ethnicity, but also indicated legal status, a complex calculus that both determined and was determined by class, status, wealth, and ancestry.¹⁰⁴ Roughly speaking, within the province of Aegyptus, an Egyptian meant anyone who did not enjoy distinguished status (Alexandrian or Roman) or qualify for legal privileges, regardless of what cultural or ethnic identity he or she might claim. So defined, Egyptians paid higher taxes, received harsher punishments for lawbreaking, and had scarce or no access to cultural institutions, such as the theater and gymnasium. Indeed, there were laws on the books that determined when and under what conditions Egyptians could leave the province at all.

As a series of letters from Pliny the Younger to the emperor Trajan shows, Romans in Italy recognized and deemed relevant these distinctions of status. Pliny managed to enlist his personal doctor, a man from Egypt, as a Roman citizen, but did so without first securing Alexandrian status for him, which meant that, as an Egyptian, the doctor could not lawfully leave the province. The emperor only reluctantly rectified the situation.¹⁰⁵ (Egyptian doctors were considered particularly skillful, and seem to have been in some demand. Pliny the Elder also notes a number who were brought to Rome under Tiberius in a time of epidemic.¹⁰⁶) Similarly, a young man from Roman Egypt who had joined the navy, a move that brought with it an improvement in status, wrote to his father from Misenum to tell him his new Roman name, Antonius Maximus. In a legal sense, he left behind his identity as Egyptian once he left Aegyptus.¹⁰⁷ This evidence, again, suggests that people from the province of Aegyptus were resident in Rome, but suggests further that they constructed their identities in complex and varied ways. This is not to say that aspects of their prior identities were unimportant, whether family ties or religious beliefs. Rather, cases like this show that those who moved from Aegyptus to Italy tended to emphasize prestige in Italian terms, which serves to render natives of Egypt less visible in the epigraphic record. Powerful social incentives motivated people *not* to self-identify as Egyptian in Italy.¹⁰⁸

Accordingly, we cannot approach Egyptian priests (or artists) in Rome as a group segregated from Italian society, but must view them as integrated within it. For example, one of Nero's tutors was a philosopher named Chaeremon, author of a book called the *Hieroglyphica*, offering a symbolical interpretation of the Egyptian script which ascribed a single meaning to each character. A woman beating a drum, for example, indicated "joy"; the falcon indicated "the soul."¹⁰⁹ A number of sources say that he was also a priest, though this title may simply suggest that he held a position of authority in the library at Alexandria before coming to Rome.¹¹⁰ An otherwise unknown author named Hermapion wrote a book in Greek about hieroglyphic texts in Rome, which was later cited by Ammianus Marcellinus; based on his training and name, he too may have been a priest.¹¹¹ From the time of Augustus, there was a vibrant community of intellectuals resident in Rome from throughout the eastern Mediterranean who continued to write in Greek.¹¹² Persons born outside Italy, including intellectuals of Egyptian origin, could find places in Italian literary or artistic circles by finding patrons or administrative positions. To the extent that we know much of their literary output or agendas (for the work of both is heavily redacted), both Chaeremon and Hermapion positioned themselves as interpreters of Egyptian wisdom and knowledge for outside communities. Yet they did so in ways that do not treat the language as a modern translator would, or indeed as would an ancient practitioner of the language, creating new texts for monuments or ritual purposes. Chaeremon, for example, expounds a view of the hieroglyphic script as language, but treats it as wholly symbolic rather than having grammar and syntax.¹¹³ Hermapion's translation, now proven to be based on an original Egyptian text, is not literal either. In essence, it transforms the Egyptian content in order to speak to readers presumed to have a different worldview.¹¹⁴

In light of this context, in which only a small number of people in both Egypt and Italy knew the hieroglyphic script as a language system, the Roman-made obelisks are all the more remarkable, testaments to the skill and erudition of their authors. In many respects, the evidence both for the tenacity of the script and for the shifts in meaning attendant upon its translation into new contexts accords well with recent work about the loss of writing systems across cultures. John Baines has argued that only actors who worked within linguistic systems can find literal meaning in fading scripts, as the last practitioners of language and culture.¹¹⁵ Applying this thesis to the Italian obelisks, we may understand these inscribed dedications as meaningful in two ways. To those involved in the creation of the monument, both the patron interested in making a statement and the author charged with making the statement on his behalf, it was paramount that the monuments presented intelligible text. They wanted to know *both* that it meant something *and* what it meant, but that text would have a different resonance for the broader Roman audience, untutored in the script. Didactic texts like those of Chaeremon show that Romans understood

hieroglyphics as bearers of meaning on a visual and symbolic level. (Nor, it should be stressed, would most Egyptians have been able to read the script at any period in its history, for literacy was always highly privileged.¹¹⁶) For untutored audiences, the vast majority, the visual display was paramount.

But what of the carving of hieroglyphs or the use of distinctly Egyptian methods of artistic production? Many Egyptian-looking artworks in Italy adopt what appears to be a convincing Egyptian style, sometimes working in methods not otherwise used in Italy, such as sunken relief or combined perspective. It is certainly fair to assume, given the evidence for the movement of goods through the Mediterranean, that artists and artisans with specialized training could have emigrated from Alexandria to Rome, just as artists from Greece did. There is insufficient information to make generalizations about their ubiquity, however, and ample evidence to suggest that artists working in Italy, whatever their place of origin or background, could have worked in “foreign” styles and techniques. Because so many of these works are of hard stones, such as granite, basalt, or porphyry, we can imagine specialists trained in working imported *marmora*. Yet that fact alone tells us little, as artists in Rome were able to work these stones to a fine finish in any number of visual styles.

A number of Egyptian-looking artworks in Italy are emulations closely based on imported material, in a few cases one-to-one copies of extant sculptures or monuments: a pair of sphinxes from the Iseum Campense, two monumental representations of Arsinoe from the Horti Sallustiani, and the Trinità dei Monti obelisk. These examples reveal something of the tastes of Roman patrons, demonstrating a predilection for matched pairs, and are suggestive on the subject of artists’ methods. Making new artworks based on existing ones was standard practice for much Roman art, from sculptures in the round to fresco paintings, much discussed in academic literature for what it tells us of contemporary aesthetics. But it was also a formal technique. “Copying” an existing work required detailed study and skill on the part of the artist. The process entailed taking precise measurements of an original (or of plaster casts reproducing the original), and also offered significant scope for modification or alteration. For instance, artists often adapted popular sculptural types to smaller scale and new media.¹¹⁷

The Trinità dei Monti obelisk, which stood in antiquity in the Horti Sallustiani, for example, is a monolith of rose granite, likely of Egyptian origin, though the date of its production is not clear. [Figure 1.15] At some point after its arrival in Rome, the obelisk was carefully inscribed with text based on that of the Piazza del Popolo obelisk, brought to Rome by Augustus in 10/9 BCE and placed in the Circus Maximus. The quality of the carving – relative, that is, to contemporary hieroglyphs from Egypt or to those of earlier periods – has struck many observers as low, and on that basis most speculate that the carving dates from the late second to the late third



FIGURE 1.15. Trinità dei Monti obelisk, with carvings adapted from the Piazza del Popolo obelisk (Roman imperial period, heavily restored).

Photo credit: author.

century CE.¹¹⁸ In this case, the style and content of the monument tell us little of the identity or ethnicity of the artists, despite the use of authentic hieroglyphic script and iconography. But that the work was done in Rome is suggestive of their methods. The embellishment of the Trinità dei Monti obelisk required careful study and scrutiny of an existing model. And this work also allowed the artists to exercise their own aesthetic judgement, or offered the patron commissioning their labor the chance to give them specific direction. Because the Trinità obelisk is significantly smaller than its model, the Egyptian texts had to be re-sized to a different scale. In the process, the scenes that show the king making offerings, at the base and apex of the obelisk, appear to have been enlarged relative to the bands of text. This is perhaps no surprise, since the majority of viewers would find most “meaning” in visual scenes.

A number of other Egyptian and Egyptian-inspired materials were found in the Horti Sallustiani, and many point to similar processes of artistic production. An Egyptian statue of Arsinoë II, 2.4 meters tall, was found in close proximity to a Roman-made emulation. [Figure 1.16; 1.17a] Both were likely

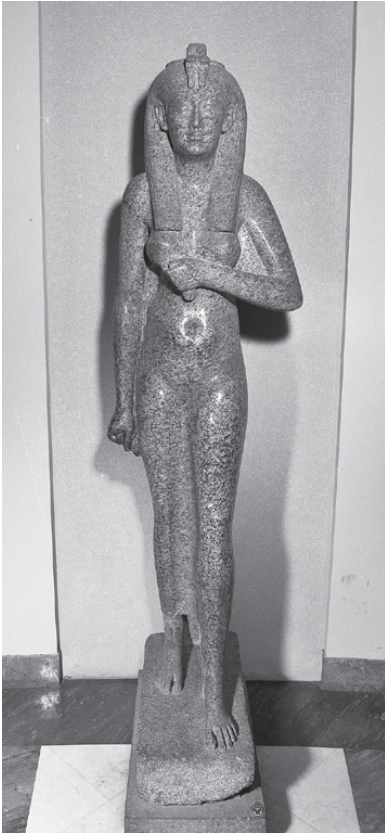


FIGURE 1.16. Imported sculpture of Arsinoë II, Horti Sallustiani (manufactured 316–270 BCE; brought to Rome, imperial period).

Photo credit: foto Musei Vaticani.

displayed together, along with a few other Egyptian-inspired artworks, in a context of indeterminate use, perhaps a shrine or a garden gallery.¹¹⁹ The new work matches its model in most respects. It is carved of a similar material and stands to the same height. Yet the artists also made changes. The Egyptian original has a hole drilled in the wig, for an attribute added in a different material; the emulation lacks this fitting because it served no purpose to the new work. Similarly, artists began to copy the hieroglyphic inscription on the rear plinth but did not complete it, whether because it would not be visible (if the sculpture was not intended to be viewed in the round) or because it was not important to have a full text but only a few representative characters. [Figure 1.17b] Again, we cannot determine the artists' ethnicity or say much about their background, beyond that their work reproduced its model with craftsmanship of the highest quality – reflective of the methods of their training.

In sum, careful attention to the content and context of monuments in Italy with made-to-order hieroglyphic text undermines the assumption that there



FIGURE 1.17a, b. Front and rear views, Roman-made statue of Arsinoë II based on 1.16, Horti Sallustiani (Roman imperial period).

Photo credit: foto Musei Vaticani.

was a correlation between artistic style or technique and the place of origin, ethnicity, or identity of the practitioner of that style or technique. There were indeed people from the province of Aegyptus resident in Italian communities, but the fact that they rarely self-identify suggests they did not live in communities unto themselves. We must consider the monuments they helped create as cultural products of Roman Italy, reflective of the many agents involved in their production – the author of the text, the artist who executed the work, and the patron who financed the project. That so many of these works are associated with sanctuary or ritual contexts attests to their authenticity in the eyes of those who commissioned and viewed them, and argues for the importance of Egyptian themes, imagery, and script in Roman Italy. Egyptian language may not have been read, understood, or even written exactly as it was in Egypt, but it nonetheless conferred a powerful ritual prestige. Yet, in fact, monuments like these make up a minority of artworks from Roman Italy that adopt an “Egyptian” visual style. In many other instances, artists working in

diverse media – from cameo glass to silver plate, from sculpture to fresco – emulated the styles of ancient Egypt for altogether different purposes.

STYLE AND SUBSTANCE: EGYPTIAN ECLECTICISM

What does it mean to say that an artwork adopts an Egyptian style? The word derives from the Latin *stilus*, a noun that designated a writing implement but which also served as a metonym for technique, referring not just to the physical act of writing but to the particular habits or turns of phrase that made an author's work recognizably his own.¹²⁰ Applied to visual artworks, we often use the word in two senses. Style can refer to the hand of the individual, describing an artist's choices regarding form, line, color, and perspective, effected to frame a subject or give best physical expression to an abstract idea. Style can also be used to characterize the artistic output of a group. For pre-modern periods, it describes the representational modes common to a culture, place, and time – a visual *koine* legible to members of a defined social group who share an aesthetic sensibility.¹²¹ Two-dimensional Egyptian art, for example, did not use color according to a naturalistic aesthetic, but to convey symbolic information. Likewise, human figures were rendered in combined perspective, showing the legs and face in profile view, but the torso and eyes in frontal view. A viewer conversant in the visual *koine* would, without needing explanation, see a body with each individual part rendered from the ideal angle, while also taking in color-coded information about gender or fertility.¹²² In other words, style can describe visual aesthetic systems in which interpretation is socially determined, visual canons that outsiders can come to appreciate through study but not always understand intuitively.

Once borrowed, as in the case of Egyptian-looking artworks made in Italy, a style's meaning shifts. There was no single Egyptian style because these representational modes were not in widespread communal practice. Nor would Roman viewers have valued the same visual formulae or canons as Egyptians, or not for the same reasons. Furthermore, as Jaś Elsner has argued, the Roman penchant for adopting styles from a wide range of cultures, times, and places was an essential feature of their own eclectic aesthetic; he defines Roman "Classicism" to include borrowing from all cultures and places, including Egypt.¹²³ Rarely can we determine with precision, therefore, what Roman viewers would have taken Egyptian style to mean beyond arguing that it, *prima facie*, evoked Egypt. Nevertheless, formal analysis of Egyptian style as it was employed in Italian visual media brings us to a deeper appreciation of its appeal and helps us uncover what might otherwise remain invisible: what, beyond sheer foreignness, Egyptian visual vocabularies added to a work of Roman manufacture.

Consider Egyptian motifs incorporated into fresco compositions. Because frescos were painted on site, we possess good information about the production

of the medium and the spatial context of the imagery. Egyptian elements in wall paintings range from framed focal points, panels depicting Egyptian deities or other figures, to decorative flourishes such as lotus-flowers or uraei incorporated into repeating friezes. Many motifs that seem inspired by Pharaonic artworks date to the Augustan period, though their popularity lasted long afterward. Those from Pompeii remained on view until the eruption of Mount Vesuvius. Later in the first century CE, these motifs of Pharaonic inspiration were increasingly joined by nilotic landscapes and representations of Isiaci.¹²⁴ In all periods, however, there was no such thing as an “Egyptian room,” that is, a room executed wholesale in an Egyptian style. Rather, artists incorporated Egyptian-looking motifs into mural compositions that otherwise observed standard conventions and that included mythological paintings, representations of plants and gardens, landscapes, and still lifes.

One of the best examples comes from the early imperial villa at Boscotrecase, dated circa 12–11 BCE. On the basis of brick stamps, the villa first belonged to Agrippa and afterward to his son Agrippa Postumus.¹²⁵ One of the small interior rooms of the villa is called the Black Room after the deep burnished color of the ground. The frescos of the north wall included two small framed panels, with scenes of Egyptians engaged in animal worship. In each, standing and kneeling figures flank small altars, on which stand a dog and bull, respectively. [Plate II; Figure 1.18] Unusual dress marks the figures as Egyptian, all rather generic save the crocodile-headed deity representing Sobek. That this representation is so strikingly “accurate,” complete with the attribute of a mason’s square, has suggested to some that the artists were working after an Egyptian model, a papyrus or something like the “Mensa Isiaca.”¹²⁶ Yet the fact that not all of the figures reflect the same level of detail leaves this theory open to debate. What is clear is that the artist(s) took special care to adopt a style appropriate to the subject. The painter rendered all four figures in combined perspective.

What was the point of this fictive Egyptian style in this setting? The villa’s connection to the imperial family suggested to Elfriede Knauer that the scene was political; she argued that the pharaoh could be taken as a portrait of Agrippa as the “king of Egypt.”¹²⁷ In the more balanced view of Magdalene Söldner, images like these in Augustan contexts have triumphal resonance, celebrating Egypt’s fall, but lack a literal, ideological meaning. Often juxtaposed with Dionysiac or sacro-idyllic motifs, she argues that Egyptian motifs create a deliberate play between the nostalgic and the foreign.¹²⁸ Formal inquiry into the style of the paintings can add to our understanding. We have good information in this case about the execution of the frescos by a two-man team. One artist, a so-called master, was responsible for the mythological paintings, landscapes, and all figural detail; a second took charge of the architectural frames and other minor elements. Egyptian details appear to be the work of the first painter and occur throughout the villa.¹²⁹ Horus falcons perch on the architectural frames on the other two walls of the Black

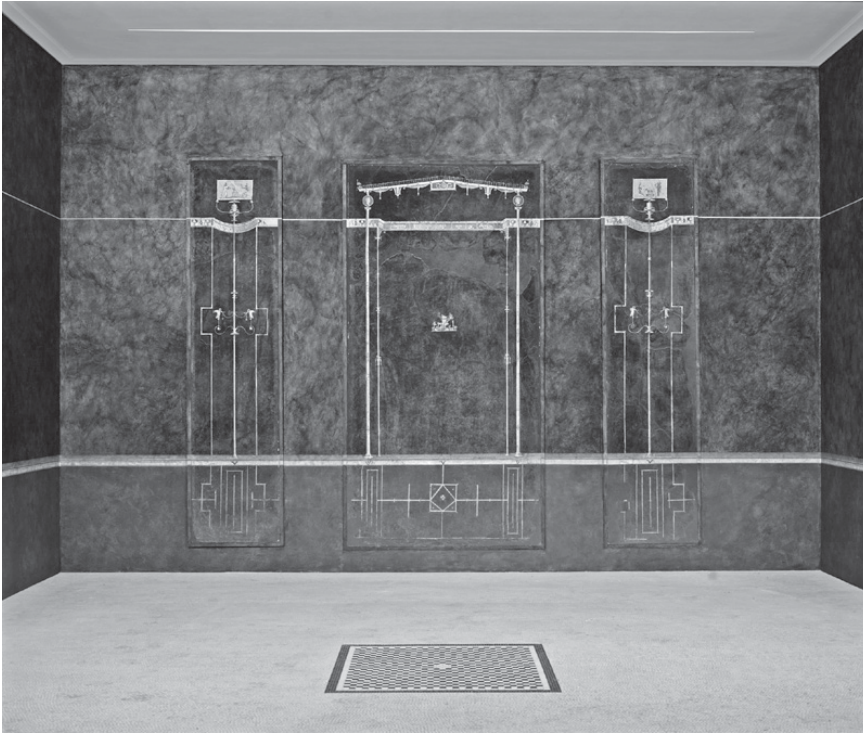


FIGURE 1.18. Reconstruction of the north wall of the Black Room, Boscotrecase (c. 11 BCE).
Photo credit: The Metropolitan Museum of Art / IAP.

Room, for example, and Room 19 includes vaguely Egyptian deities in the cornice zone. In all instances, the Egyptian flourishes were subsidiary focal points, located above or below eye level, less likely to inspire sustained contemplation than the central or framed motifs. Yet their unusual style served a distinct purpose. The artists used the dark ground of the Black Room as a canvas for manipulating depth and perspective. The columns of the *aedicula* are rendered in three dimensions, yet so attenuated that they lack physical substance; the floating landscapes adopt a birds-eye view, as if the structures are seen from above and at a distance. The formal composition presents two competing modes of perspective, inviting a viewer to contemplate the bucolic landscapes while barring the imaginary access offered by the so-called Second Style compositions still in vogue.¹³⁰ The Egyptian scenes offer a third mode of perspective, emphasized all the more by the bright, contrasting color palette. Even if we cannot identify a specific ideological explanation for the imagery, the Egyptian scenes showcased the artists' virtuosity. The choices governing line, form, and color highlighted their subjects, directed the viewer's eye, and exhibited the artists' skill.

After annexation, Egyptian motifs also appear in cameo glass. This, too, was a specialized and labor-intensive industry. Cameo glass was expensive



FIGURE 1.19. Cameo glass fragment with Egyptian-inspired tribute scene (early first century CE). Photo credit: 66.1.63 Collection of The Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, New York.

and rare, and the *communis opinio* is that these vessels were produced for only a short span of time during the early principate in workshops in Campania and Rome.¹³¹ The production process involved blowing two layers of molten glass, allowing it to harden, and then painstakingly removing the outer layer with a burin, resulting in two-tone relief. A nearly complete flask now in the Getty collection, only 7.62 cm tall, features a scene of cupids or amorini within an Egyptian sanctuary. [Figure 1.20; Plate III] The vessel does not adopt a particularly Egyptian mode of perspective, but the level of detail is exquisite. A statue of the baboon god Thoth stands upon a base on which there is an ibis, an animal sacred to that deity. Nearby stands a statue of an Egyptian pharaoh wearing a crown and kilt. Behind the figure one can see an obelisk, complete with minute hieroglyphs, all real characters though probably not a legible word.¹³² Other contemporary examples also feature Egyptian-inspired imagery. A fragment of a small perfume flask in the Corning Museum includes a tribute scene of men wearing Nubian wigs, carrying animals on their shoulders. Here, the artist adapted both Egyptian iconography and combined perspective to the new format, evident in the frontal eyes of the



FIGURE 1.20. Cameo glass vessel with scenes of cupids venerating the sculpture of a baboon, verso of Plate III (early first century CE).

Photo credit: The J. Paul Getty Museum, Villa Collection, Malibu, California.

figures. [Figure 1.19] The shape of the vessel, in contrast, was not Egyptian, but instead reproduced a two-handled amphora in miniature, mimicking an Italian type used for shipping wine (Dressel 2–4).¹³³ In both of these instances, the Egyptian style and theme enhanced the objects' value, particularly if we recall their function as containers for perfumes or other luxury unguents. Indeed, in adopting a shape based on an amphora, the Corning cameo fragment playfully nods at this function, casting the vessel as a putative object of commerce and its contents as a precious gift.

These examples speak to the appeal of fictive Egyptian style. Because the facture of fresco and cameo glass required production under controlled circumstances, we can set aside the notion that artistic style tells us anything about the identity or ethnicity of the artist. Not only are these questions unproductive, they are immaterial to assessing the object. These examples reveal that artists trained and working in workshops in Italy had the ability to emulate Egyptian styles, and in some cases with uncanny precision. None of these works attempts to pass as Egyptian; rather, each plays with Egyptian visual conventions to enhance the aesthetic value of the work. In so doing, they rely on the viewer's ability to identify style in both senses described earlier, both as reflecting the technical mastery of the individual artist and as descriptive of the cultural habitus of a foreign people, the Egyptians. By incorporating Egyptian visual vocabularies into works of their own manufacture, these works treat the style *as* the substance. The artists' skill shines through especially to those viewers who recognize the artifice involved.

To recognize in these examples the knowing, self-aware adoption of Egyptian-inspired styles is a beginning, but only a beginning. How did this confrontation of visual vocabularies and aesthetics enhance the value of pieces in which the Egyptian content was most important, as in the case of those works associated with sanctuaries to Isis? A statue of Isis from the sanctuary in Pompeii, made from imported Pentelic marble, serves as a good example of a work that combines "Egyptian" and "Greek" imagery in the service of a complex whole. [Figure 1.21a, b] The goddess stands stiffly with her proper right foot slightly in front of the left. She holds an object akin to an ankh though only convincing from the front view, imagined here as a tangible object, and wears a diadem covered with unusual rosette motifs. The hair and face draw on the visual vocabularies of archaic Greece, while the treatment of her drapery recalls the dress of many Ptolemaic statues of Isis.¹³⁴ The juxtaposition of styles plays to different aspects of the deity as her Roman followers understood her. The archaic features give her a sense of venerability; the transparent drapery reveals the goddess's fertile body; the ankh indicates her life-giving and rejuvenating powers. (That Pompeian audiences believed the ankh stood for "life" is possible if not provable; the symbol appears in a number of frescos, as for example in the Villa of the Mysteries.) Not only was the use of style potentially tailored to the *interpretatio Romana* of Isis,



FIGURE 1.21a, b. Archaizing statue of Isis, dedicated by L. Caecilius Phoebus, sanctuary of Isis, Pompeii (mid-to-late first century CE).

Photo credit: Schwanke, Neg. D-DAI-Rom 83.2165, 83.2167.

but the statue may also have been recognizable to expert eyes as the product of a local or regional workshop responsible for distinctive artworks in similar mode. A contemporary shrine in the city housed a colored and gilded statue of Diana with similar crown and add-on rosettes, identified by Mark Fullerton as a cult statue in a private setting.¹³⁵

In this case, we also have good information regarding the circumstances of the dedication, display, and maintenance of the piece. Excavators found the statue in the northeast corner of the portico, where many dedications were put on display. Its inscription identified its dedicator as Lucius Caecilius Phoebus: “Lucius Caecilius Phoebus placed [the statue], with the spot having been given by the town council.”¹³⁶ As is discussed in [Chapter 3](#), this inscription indicates that the town council voted collectively to give Lucius Caecilius Phoebus the honor of putting a dedication on public display. The language here suggests that Lucius Caecilius Phoebus made a gift to the goddess recognized by his community but does not say that the gift was consecrated, that is, transferred from his ownership and control to that of the goddess or her cult.

Lucius Caecilius Phoebus may have maintained responsibility for keeping the statue in good repair, an ongoing act of devotion. When found, the piece was complete but bore traces of damage, perhaps from the earthquake, that had been carefully repaired afterward.¹³⁷ Furthermore, there was evidence of the application of gold leaf, again speaking to a desire for this piece to make a striking visual impact. The mixture of styles, in this case, was not just thematically appropriate to the subject of the piece but also reflected a deliberate decision of the work's patron about how to express his personal relationship with the goddess and how best to ensure that his dedication would grab the eyes of passersby.

We also have at least one example of an Egyptianizing dedication showcasing the work of a named (or pseudonymed) artist. An artist named Phidias signed a dedication in overtly Egyptian style from the Iseum Campense, drawing implicit connection between this Italian craftsman and the Greek master sculptor. [Figure 1.22a, b] Just over a meter tall, the sculpture takes the form of a baboon, sitting with hands perched on bent knees. Like many Egyptian-looking artworks of Roman manufacture, this piece was likely based on an imported Egyptian model.¹³⁸ Its surface is pockmarked and scarred; the head and right shoulder are missing, as are the front and right sides of the base. Some of the damage appears to have been caused by acts of repeated touch, particularly a spot of wear on the right hand, where the fingers are worn down. The neck has a dowel hole and was perhaps replaced or repaired in antiquity.¹³⁹ The style of the piece suits its subject, and its condition stands as witness to the fact that its donor and the community of the sanctuary valued it.

The base is also in a poor state of repair, but a number of inscriptions in Greek and Latin are still visible or known from early antiquarian study. These allow the work to be dated to 159 CE.¹⁴⁰ As often with bilingual inscriptions, the languages code-switch so that the language employed reflects the information expressed.¹⁴¹ The front face, in Greek, states that an individual, whose full name is now lost, “set up” the statue, the functional equivalent of *dedit*, marking the transfer of property into the cult.¹⁴² The language is appropriate to the context, for many dedications in Italian sanctuaries to the Egyptian gods employ Greek. On the left side, an inscription in Latin consecrates the gift: “The place was assigned by Aulus Caelius [and] ... illianus Maximus, curators of sacred temples and public works. [The statue] was dedicated on the ... of September with Quintillus and Priscus consuls.”¹⁴³ The right side gives the names of the artists, “Phidias and Ammo(nios), [sons] of Phidias made [it].”¹⁴⁴

The spellings of the two names, Φιδίας for Φειδίας and Αμμόνιος for Ἀμμώνιος, are not unusual for the second century CE, during which orthography followed common pronunciation. Although the name Ammonios has an Egyptian resonance for modern readers, deriving from Zeus-Ammon and



FIGURE 1.22a, b. Sculpture of a baboon inscribed, “Phidias and Ammonios made it,” associated with the Iseum and Serapaeum Campense (dedicated 159 CE).

Photo credit: foto Musei Vaticani.

ultimately Amun, the name does not provide evidence of the artist's place of origin, ethnicity, or religious beliefs. Although in theory theophoric names attested to an interest in a particular deity on the part of a child's parents, at the time this artwork was made, many names that seem Egyptian (e.g., deriving from Isis or Serapis), were popular, bearing only a generic positive association or attesting to the point of origin of a distant relative.¹⁴⁵ As a proper name, Pheidias was rarer, most common in mainland Greece and Athens in the period from roughly the fourth to second centuries BCE, with a regional popularity in the first century BCE and first century CE in Asia Minor and periodic attestation elsewhere through the imperial period.¹⁴⁶ The orthography may also recall versions of the name as translated into Latin, Fidias, attested thus in the imperial period.¹⁴⁷ Neither appellation allows us to identify the one so named as associated with a distinct ethnic or religious group. Yet the inscription does indicate that both were members of a workshop, which allows us to situate the piece within the broader context of the production of sculpture in second century Rome.

Although signed sculptures are rare in Roman contexts, those we do have were often inscribed with Greek names or names selected to suggest a connection to Greek masters. This nomenclature did not necessarily imply that the works they produced were reproductions of the work of old masters, but rather likened their makers' skill to that of the greats.¹⁴⁸ An epitaph from Rome, for example, belonging to an artist who identified himself as Eutychides the Milesian said that he trained in the technique of Praxiteles.¹⁴⁹ Here, then, the name of one artist recalled Pheidias, the legendary Athenian sculptor. The legacy of Pheidias, son of Charmides, was well known in the second century CE. Court poets evoked his legendary skill and compared their art to his own.¹⁵⁰ Later, Dio Chrysotom conjured him and interrogated him in a fictional trial about why he represented the great god Zeus as he did.¹⁵¹ A series of tituli from imperial Rome proclaim artworks to be those of famous sculptors, including one labeled *opus Fidiaie*.¹⁵² The workshop to which Phidias and Ammonios belonged thus staked a claim to this distinctive artistic genealogy, thereby advertising their work's legitimacy and excellence. Nor were they alone in doing so. A signed statue of a togatus from Merida also bears an inscription in which the artist likened himself to the master sculptor.¹⁵³

Apart from the artists' inscription, this sculpture in its form and appearance, serves as testament to the power of "traditional" Egyptian iconography in the Italian cults, an incarnation of the deity Thoth of a type pervasive in sanctuary settings, from Pompeii to Rome to Beneventum. This image of the god had wide enough currency to have become a standard feature of Roman reliefs purporting to depict sanctuaries, such as the Getty flask or a well-known relief from Ariccia, which depicts the interior of a sanctuary, complete with representations of statues of baboons and bulls, incarnations of Thoth and Apis. While the work undoubtedly suited its particular context in

visual style, it proclaimed its excellence *qua* artwork by drawing on altogether different cultural traditions, through the association between the artists who crafted it and the legacy of Classical Greece.

EGYPT IN THE EMPIRE

Rome's interest in the culture and place of Egypt was no simple phenomenon. For most people living in Italy, the physical land of Egypt was so remote that it was necessarily imagined, yet it was also omnipresent. Temples to the Egyptian gods were found in cities throughout the peninsula; grain from Egypt was on the table. Exotic artworks could be found in homes, tombs, public porticoes – almost anywhere. Interest in Egyptian goods, images, and themes endured both in *and* after those periods in which Aegyptus occupied a prominent place in Rome's political affairs.

In attempting to understand the appeal of the varied material that bears witness to this phenomenon, we overlook the relationship between artworks and more quotidian goods at our peril. Economic interests tied the province to the capital for centuries without cease, and imported artworks, from the monumental to the minute, are in fact the sole remaining testament to commercial trade between the two regions. Egyptian products of all sorts, raw and refined, from cheap vinegar to highly processed *charta*, filled the Italian marketplace. That many would not have recognized vinegar or grain, gems or marbles as Egyptian in origin underscores the extent of the integration of these goods into the Roman economy. At the same time, their invisibility serves as a foil against which to examine works of art that proclaimed their Egyptian origin (or putative Egyptian origin) overtly, through unusual visual vocabularies and enigmatic texts. The association of Egypt as a land of riches is evident in the adoption of these motifs in elite media from frescos to fineware.

These monuments bear witness to the place of Egypt in the Roman Empire, and thus they stand at a tricky cultural intersection, requiring the interpretative tools of a number of academic disciplines. Though Egyptian and Egyptianizing objects have been meticulously catalogued, studied, and re-studied, many examples continue to go unremarked for the simple reason that we do not know what to do with them or understand what issues they can speak to. What do they tell us about, if not the cult of Isis or the persistence of age-old Egyptian culture in a changing world? The contrast in scholarly approaches can lead to a push-pull between, for example, those who understand Egyptian-looking material as primarily or exclusively evidence for religious practice and those who treat it as primarily or exclusively decorative. Yet these are not binary divides. It is true that many imported artworks belonged to sanctuary settings. The mistake is to stop the discussion at that point and fail to see that sanctuaries of Isis in Italian cities were also integrated

into their communities on a number of levels. These sanctuaries provided the ground on which Egypt and Italy met, and they were at once exotic *and* familiar, featuring Egyptian-inspired décor but governed by the same social conventions for gift-giving as were temples to any deity.

In the chapters that follow, I ask us to look at old material in new ways, to press beyond their Egyptian façade by asking questions that set exotic artworks into broader conversations – investigating patronage, contextual display, and the relationship between visual and textual discourses. Doing so in no way diminishes the richness of this evidence for other courses of study. If anything, this approach underscores how far ideas sometimes deemed foreign had filtered into broad currency, as authors inserted Isis into favorite myths, or artists used new visual vocabularies to enhance the social and monetary value of their wares. Despite their unusual features, Egyptian-looking artworks are vital and central to any history of Roman art that investigates the impact of Rome's imperial aspirations and achievements on its material culture, produced by and for an increasingly diverse and multilingual citizenry.

2

AEGYPTUS REDACTA: AUGUSTUS' OBELISKS AND THE SPOILS OF EGYPT

Nearly a century after Augustus' reign had ended, the biographer Suetonius attributed to the emperor a now-famous line, summing up his renovation of Rome: "And he improved the city, not then adorned befitting the majesty of the empire and liable to flooding and fires, to such an extent that he boasted with right that he left it behind as made of marble, which he had accepted as made-of-brick."¹ It is a powerful image: Suetonius describes the city of brick as *latericia*, evoking rough but functional sun-dried tiles; the city of marble is *marmorea*, a word which implies not just stark white marble from Italian quarries, but brightly colored decorative marbles, granites, and porphyries from throughout the empire, including Greece, North Africa, and Egypt.² This chapter looks at two Egyptian monuments brought to Rome by Augustus: the obelisk of Sety I and Ramesses II, 21.91 meters tall, which stands today in the Piazza del Popolo, and the obelisk of Psametik II, 21.79 meters, today in front of the Palazzo Montecitorio.³ [Figures 2.1, 2.2] In 10/9 BCE, Augustus had them placed upon bases, roughly 3 meters on a side and also made of rose granite, with identical inscriptions: "Caesar Augustus, imperator, son of a *divus*, *pontifex maximus*, imperator twelve times, consul eleven times, with tribunician power fourteen times. With Egypt having been brought into the domain of the Roman people, Augustus gave this gift to the sun."⁴ The Piazza del Popolo obelisk stood in the Circus Maximus in full view of the assembled populace at the center of the racing track. The Montecitorio obelisk functioned as the gnomon of the Meridian (often in the past called the Horologium) in the Campus Martius, a travertine pavement marked with a single bronze guideline used for tracking the length of the shadow each day at noon. Both monuments have been widely understood as symbols celebrating the conquest of Egypt, signature statements in colored stone.

Recent scholarship has refocused attention on Egyptian obelisks in Rome, investigating the feats of engineering that allowed for their transportation and exploring their emplacement in new contexts, in which they were put to ingenious uses "measuring" time and space.⁵ Yet of all the obelisks, Augustus'



FIGURE 2.1. The Montecitorio obelisk, commission of Psametik II (manufactured, Twenty-Sixth Dynasty, r. 595–589 BCE), brought to Rome by Augustus (10/9 BCE).

Photo credit: author.

are perhaps the best known, and not simply because they were the first to cross the Mediterranean. Scholars have required them to do some heavy lifting in service of theories about the relationship between political ideology and the topography of Rome. So, for example, the Piazza del Popolo obelisk in the Circus Maximus made the arena seem both microcosm and universe, a place where the Roman people assembled and where “the race of chariots around the barrier could be compared to the movement of the heavenly bodies around the sun.”⁶ Even more famously, the Montecitorio obelisk has been thought to forge a narrative connection between the structures of the Campus Martius, reminding viewers that Augustus’ triumphs (embodied by the obelisk) resulted in a golden age (embodied by the Ara Pacis, where depictions of ordered society were flanked by mythological subjects celebrating fertile Italy). The subject is one of intense and continuing debate.⁷ Even so, the obelisks themselves receive surprisingly little consideration.

In this chapter, I ask us to look anew at Augustus’ obelisks as victory monuments, in a way that acknowledges the individuated history and symbolic



FIGURE 2.2. The Piazza del Popolo obelisk, manufactured Sety I (Nineteenth Dynasty), completed by Ramesses II (Nineteenth Dynasty), brought to Rome by Augustus (10/9 BCE).

Photo credit: author.

agency of each. What did Roman audiences make of these monuments individually and together, and what could they have known of their histories? The answers require us to take a diachronic view of the monuments from their creation in Egypt through late antiquity. I consider their display in Rome from a series of different vantage points, situating them first relative to other celebrations of conquest in Egypt and in Rome. Although Augustus' obelisks were indeed potent symbols of the annexation of Egypt, their transportation also reflects the political situation two decades after the battles of Actium and Alexandria. By the time the monuments were brought to Rome, a healthy interest in Egypt had developed – independently – in the private sphere. I explore one particularly rich case study, the tomb of Gaius Cestius, which similarly appropriated royal Egyptian imagery to make a statement about its patron's influence. Augustus' obelisks did not inspire these trends but certainly spoke to them: they celebrated Egypt as a defeated foreign enemy, but also emphasized its place within the empire as a vital organ of the Roman

state. Educated Romans had access to more and better information about these monuments than is often acknowledged. Although they may not have understood the “Egyptian symbolism” as Egyptian audiences would have (either those of the past, or those living in the Egypt of the Roman present), the obelisks’ symbolism *as the Romans understood it* enhanced their meaning in Augustus’ new city of marble, showing him to have a special relationship with his people as their beneficent guardian and with the gods as their favored son.

AUGUSTUS’ EGYPTIAN OBELISKS

While my primary focus is on the Augustan lives of the Montecitorio and Piazza del Popolo obelisks, I advocate a diachronic and individuated approach to these monuments and others like them. No single phase of an obelisk’s history can be entirely divorced from the others, for all of the obelisks in Rome were subject to repeated acts of transportation, excavation, and reconstruction over time. It is important to be aware of the later interventions, for we see the Roman monuments only through the lens of subsequent repair. The Montecitorio obelisk, for instance, was first brought to Rome in 10 BCE by Augustus and stood until roughly the twelfth century CE, when it fell and suffered significant damage in a fire. Thus, before it could be erected again in 1792 under the aegis of Pope Pius VI, the monument was heavily reconstructed, patched with rose granite salvaged from the column of Antoninus Pius. The monument that stands today is neither wholly Egyptian nor Roman but an amalgam joining together materials from both ancient cultures into an entirely new monument by means of eighteenth century handicraft.⁸ It is also important to consider, even if briefly, the Egyptian lives of these monuments; failure to do so allows the fact of their appropriation to control their art-history. And, though reuse of a work can indeed eclipse its original function, we go too far if we assume total ignorance on the part of those who made older, exotic, or unusual artworks their own, whether by seizing them as an act of war, buying them on the market, inheriting them as heirlooms, or acquiring them in some other way. In many cases, new meanings are contingent on appropriators’ best understanding of the peoples of the past. Egyptian antiquities reused in Islamic contexts were believed to ward off reptiles; those in Roman contexts were ascribed a generalized magical function. In both cases, the new meanings relied on different, but sincere, interpretations of the hieroglyphic script.⁹ Before turning to the Roman settings, then, it is useful to consider the Egyptian histories of Augustus’ obelisks.

Generally speaking, obelisks are monoliths with a four-sided square base, tapering to an isosceles pyramidion. The word “obelisk” comes from the way Greeks described their shape, as akin to an ὀβελίσκος, a small spit or skewer. Today, we continue to employ Greek-derived terminology because

the Egyptian terms are obscure and difficult to render. In Middle Egyptian, obelisks are *thn*; the pyramidion is *bnbn*. Both may be taken to describe the shape of the monument, but they also imply regeneration through sexual action, alluding to the act of “rising” or “becoming erect,” perhaps thereby evoking the Egyptian creation myth in which the primeval mound rose from watery chaos.¹⁰ The Egyptian monuments employed this common form in part because it was efficacious, suitable to their roles as cult objects. Most monumental obelisks belonged to temples to the sun god in his various forms at the sanctuary site called by the Greeks and Romans Heliopolis, the city of the sun. (The Egyptians called the site *iwnw*, “pillar.”) Razed by the Persians, plundered by both the Ptolemies and the Romans, the city was finally abandoned in the first century CE.¹¹

Most obelisks were fashioned from distinctive rose granite from the southern quarries near Aswan. The hardness of the stone enabled the creation of monuments that stood to towering heights; the granite’s luminosity when polished was particularly appropriate for dedications to the sun.¹² The production of obelisks entailed quarrying deep trenches to either side of the chosen block in the quarries using simple tools of diorite. Eventually workmen tunneled under the partially formed monuments in order to detach them whole from the living rock. The process was laborious and dangerous, and required meticulous planning and coordination from start to finish. One New Kingdom monolith that broke along a fault in the stone during the process was abandoned in situ. [Figure 2.3] Once removed from the quarries, the monuments were partially carved and ferried down the Nile; they were erected and fully finished on site, which included the additional carving and surface polishing. Sometimes the shaft or pyramidion was further revetted with thin sheets of precious metal.¹³ In the height of the New Kingdom, this process could be completed quickly. There is an inscription testifying to an obelisk of Hatshepsut that was finished in just seven months.¹⁴ Thus, obelisks were spectacular displays of kingship, harnessing Egypt’s natural resources and mobilizing its human workforce to create monuments that were understood as petrified sun-beams, which benefited the land and reflected the authority of the king in gleaming stone.

Sety I, the second king of the Nineteenth Dynasty, commissioned what is now the Piazza del Popolo obelisk. [Figure 2.2] Although his reign was relatively short, it was pivotal in establishing the nascent New Kingdom. His father, though of non-royal blood, had been adopted by the last king of the so-called Second Intermediate Period but died soon thereafter. It fell to Sety I to commission the temple renovations, reliefs, colossi, and obelisks that would legitimate the dynasty. He lavished attention on the sanctuary to the sun at Heliopolis, and obelisks figured prominently in his architectural program.¹⁵ One of the inscriptions on the Piazza del Popolo obelisk proclaimed him “the one who fills Heliopolis with obelisks, of shining rays, with whose beauty the

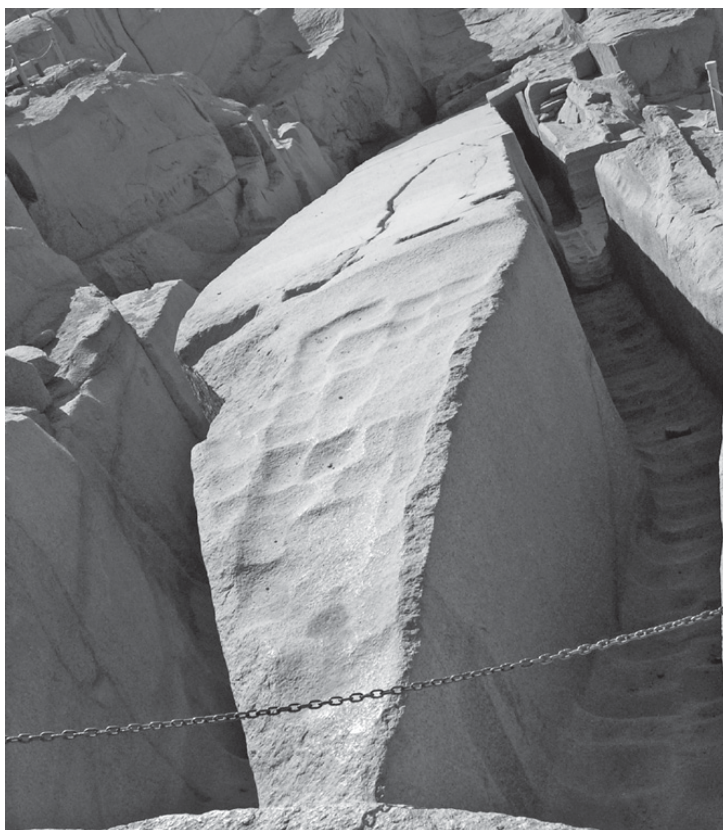


FIGURE 2.3. The unfinished obelisk of Aswan, detail of the pyramidion (New Kingdom).
Photo credit: Jill Blondin.

House of Re is pervaded.”¹⁶ The Piazza del Popolo obelisk and its lost Egyptian twin, therefore, were key components of a much wider monumental campaign employing the form as a symbol of enduring prosperity and the divinity of the king. The Piazza del Popolo obelisk, too, is notable because we can reconstruct something of the process of its creation, transportation, and final finishing. Two stele from Aswan dated to the ninth year of Sety I’s reign testify that he ordered a number of monumental works from the quarries, including the obelisks and colossal granite statues.¹⁷ Yet the Piazza del Popolo obelisk bears Sety’s cartouche on only three sides. The fourth attributes the monument to his successor, Ramesses II (Nineteenth Dynasty), suggesting completion early in the latter’s reign. This monument, then, provides some of the best evidence for how Egyptian obelisks were finished: artists carved the fourth side after the monument was raised, working on precarious scaffolds.

The Montecitorio obelisk, bound for Augustus’ Campus Martius, is also important among the extant obelisks for it was the first such monument quarried after the New Kingdom, a revival of the form that would be widely emulated in the Late Period.¹⁸ [Figure 2.1] Necho II and his son

Psametik II, the second and third kings of Egypt's Twenty-Sixth Dynasty (r. 610–595 BCE and r. 594–589 BCE) commissioned the monument and finished it. The monument was extracted from the traditional quarries near Aswan, but the rose granite material took on an additional charge in the Late Period. Only two generations earlier, Egypt had been splintered in two, with Nubian (or Kushite) kings controlling the territories south of Thebes and with a number of minor kings reigning in the Delta. The Nubian rulers exploited the quarries for their own purposes, but concentrated their monumental constructions at Thebes and points south.¹⁹ Transported the length of Egypt and standing in Heliopolis, then, the Montecitorio obelisk was a testament to the newly reunified state, part of a programmatic archaism that celebrated and attempted to recreate Egypt's glory days. Its material was part of the message: the use of rose granite telegraphed the king's control of all of Egypt's resources.

There can be no doubt that these monoliths were fascinating to the Romans because they were emblems of Egypt and its kings. What the Romans understood their Egyptian significance to be, however it may differ from our understanding of their histories, served as the solid foundation of their new symbolism. I return to address this question in full in the next section. Yet perhaps the most salient fact of the ostentatious display of Augustus' obelisks was their novelty – their like had never been seen in the Rome of 10 BCE. To bring *any* obelisk to Rome required expenditure on an unprecedented scale, and Augustus' obelisks were no different. Re-erected in the capital city, set on new bases, and capped with bronze globes and spires, these monuments were emblems of the emperor's munificence, the empire's expanse, and the ingenuity of Rome's best engineers and architects.²⁰

CELEBRATING CONQUEST: VICTORY MONUMENTS AND THE SPOILS OF EGYPT

On August 1, 30 BCE, Octavian delivered the final blow to Antony and Cleopatra at the battle of Alexandria, with the help of his general Cornelius Gallus.²¹ In the aftermath, Octavian set in motion a number of plans to celebrate his victory, culminating in a triumph at Rome so splendid that it exerted an influence on poetry and the arts lasting throughout his long reign. Although Rome's civil war had ended, the decades following were crucial to the reestablishment of peace and control of the empire's territories. If anything, the numerous early celebrations of martial victory papered over the fact that control of Egypt was not seamless. In short, Egypt was not conquered in a day, despite these public pronouncements, advertised by the circulation of coins in Rome and in the provinces that depicted chained crocodiles, sometimes accompanied by the legend "with Egypt having been taken!"²² Indeed, one rare issue of the well-known series from the veteran's colony at Nemausus



FIGURE 2.4a. Coin, mint of Rome or Brundisium. Reverse legend: *aegypt(o) capta* (28 BCE).
Photo credit: © Trustees of the British Museum.



FIGURE 2.4b. Copper coin or votive offering. Obverse: Augustus and Agrippa; obverse legend: *imp(erator) div(i) f(i)lius*. Reverse: chained crocodile; reverse legend: *col(onia) Nem(ausus)* (c. 28 BCE).

Photo credit: © Trustees of the British Museum.

seems to have been issued for an extra-pecuniary purpose – perhaps as a victory token. [Figure 2.4a, 2.4b]

Throughout his reign, Octavian negotiated his social position and the transition of the Roman government to a functional monarchy in part through architectural campaigns, both in Rome and in the provinces.²³ Immediately following the battles of Actium and Alexandria, he founded two victory cities, both named Nikopolis, and instituted quinquennial games in each.²⁴

The foundations of his memorial at the Actian Nikopolis are extant today. The monument consisted of a long podium, decorated with ships' prows salvaged from the naval battle. An inscription on the podium proclaimed that Octavian had secured "peace on land and sea," foreshadowing the language he would later use in the *Res Gestae*.²⁵ Although no traces remain of the victory city near Alexandria, it was by all accounts even more impressive. Strabo tells us that some of its buildings were so splendid that those in Alexandria fell into disuse. It included monuments that brought Roman social institutions to Egypt, such as courts for the practice of law and the amphitheater for gladiatorial entertainments.²⁶

Recent years have dispelled the belief that Aegyptus was a special province divorced from the rest of the empire, its internal structure and governance little altered. To the contrary, the post-conquest period was a time of negotiation and change.²⁷ Although his stay in Alexandria was brief, Octavian saw to a number of pressing concerns in person, including the payment of his troops from the plunder of Cleopatra's palaces and the exaction of a levy on the locals – according to Dio, up to two-thirds of their monetary worth.²⁸ Some portion of these funds was set aside for improvements to the local infrastructure, including dredging the canal systems and the refurbishment of temples throughout upper and lower Egypt.²⁹

Octavian's actions after the battle of Alexandria were critical, too, in the eyes of observers who reported back to those at home. He openly toured the city's landmarks and addressed its citizens in Greek, making a public performance of his control of the city. At the same time, he made clear his refusal to be seen as a successor to the Ptolemies. This differentiation is perhaps best exhibited by the popular anecdote that he paid homage to the body of Alexander but refused to acknowledge the memorials of the Ptolemies. In Suetonius' telling, Octavian placed a gold crown upon Alexander's brow and covered his body with flowers. When asked if he wanted to see the Ptolemies, Octavian said that "he had wished to see the body of a king, not dead men."³⁰ Judith McKenzie has suggested this was a staged event, done in the open and in the presence of a large crowd near the city's gymnasium.³¹ In so doing, Octavian acknowledged the city's special relationship to its founder and recognized the importance of local cultural institutions critical to elite life and citizenship; but he refused to accept the Ptolemies as "divine" according to a worldview that envisioned the king as the intermediary between man and the gods. Finally, before his departure, he established Cornelius Gallus as the first *praefectus aegypti* and then left, never to return.

In Rome, it would take roughly a year to plan and implement Octavian's victory celebration, coordinated with the dedication of a number of renovated and *de novo* monuments. Octavian held the triple triumph on August 13, 14, and 15 of 29 BCE, celebrating victories in Illyria, Actium, and Egypt, respectively. The scattered literary sources attesting to the event

suggest it was a magnificent affair.³² Dio's account is the fullest and paints a memorable picture, culminating in the parading of an effigy of the dead Cleopatra, accompanied by her surviving children, Alexander Helios and Cleopatra Selene.³³ Directly following, Octavian rode in a chariot with his own close relatives, Tiberius and Marcellus, to either side on horseback.³⁴ Other testimonia are brief but intriguing. Suetonius tells of hand-outs of money so large that they had an impact on the price of real estate.³⁵ Propertius describes what may be a painting displayed in the triumph depicting the personified province and the Nile and its tributaries: "Or should I sing about Aegyptus and the Nile, when it was dragged into the city, weak with its seven captive waters."³⁶ Dio says that the procession included a hippopotamus and rhinoceros, never before seen in Rome.³⁷ This last detail serves as reminder that we must take these sources with a grain of salt, for Pliny reports that these animals were known in Rome since the Republic.³⁸ Whatever the case, this watershed celebration burned bright in Rome's communal memory.

As with all triumphs, the display of spoils from the captured lands was of critical importance. Dio writes that their like had never been seen. What these treasures were, however, we do not know. Dio calls them simply ἄγαλμα, which indicates that they were artworks and sacred gifts.³⁹ Earlier in his discussion of the siege of Alexandria, Dio mentions that Cleopatra had so thoroughly plundered the sanctuaries of Egypt that the Romans had nothing left to seize, and simply removed everything from her palace without incurring any stain from plundering holy sites.⁴⁰ Perhaps, on this basis, the spoils included dedications or temple treasures. Pliny provides a few suggestive anecdotes. He mentions, for example, a marvelous representation of Janus from Egypt eventually placed in the temple in the Forum Holitorium that was thought to be the work either of Scopas or Praxiteles, though in Pliny's day it was impossible to say which because the work had been completely re-covered in gold leaf.⁴¹ He also refers to a magnificent pearl that once belonged to Cleopatra, which Octavian ordered cut into two halves and hung as earrings on the cult statue to Venus in Agrippa's Pantheon.⁴² These literary descriptions aside, it is difficult to associate the spoils with known artworks. Much of the booty, in fact, may have taken the form of armor, weaponry, and specie.

Whatever the nature of the spoils, Octavian determined the sites of their eventual deposition with great care. Following the death of Caesar, the triumvirs had begun a number of monuments intended to honor his memory, including a new curia and a temple dedicated to him as *divus*. But their construction languished for years. After Actium, Octavian saw these monuments to completion and coordinated their dedication with the triumph, depositing spoils in each.⁴³ He took sole credit for their construction, stating explicitly in the *Res Gestae* that the structures and their contents were paid for from spoils, *ex manubiis*, though this broadly refers to income from all of his victories.⁴⁴

Dio makes it clear, however, that those spoils specifically from the Actian and Egyptian triumphs were used to deliberate effect.

After finishing this celebration, Caesar dedicated the temple of Minerva, called also the Chalcidicum, and the Curia Julia, which had been built in honor of his father. In the latter he set up the statue of Victory which is still in existence, thus signifying probably that it was from her that he had received the empire. It had belonged to the people of Tarentum, whence it was now brought to Rome, placed in the senate-chamber, and decked with the spoils of Egypt. The same course was followed in the case of the shrine of Julius which was consecrated at this time, for many of these spoils were placed in it also; and others were dedicated to Juno, Minerva, after all the objects in these temples which were supposed to have been placed in there previously as dedications, or were actually dedications, had by decree been taken down at this time as defiled. Thus, Cleopatra, though defeated and captured, was nevertheless glorified, inasmuch as her adornments repose as dedications in our temples and she herself is seen in gold in the shrine of Venus.⁴⁵

Some features of the passage are curious, namely the assertion that previously dedicated material was removed from the Capitolium and other temples on a pretext, so as to allow Octavian's new dedications to take center stage. On Dio's witness, the new material included Cleopatra's personal property and a statue of the queen. The otherwise empty temples would have underscored all the more the lavish displays of newly dedicated treasures. Dio implies elsewhere, too, that Octavian reconsecrated materials that Cleopatra had seized from Egyptian temples, now sacred to the Roman gods. Octavian thus showed her to ill effect even as he honored the materials themselves.

Other literary sources affirm what Dio says of the triumphal displays in the Curia, and remind us that the Egyptian spoils formed part of elaborate displays bringing together material of many origins. Dio says that the Victory of Tarentum had been brought for the express purpose of being set atop the Egyptian treasures. This statue was famous in antiquity and possibly the source of the winged victory motif adopted shortly thereafter on Augustus' coinage.⁴⁶ Pliny says that Octavian also set two ancient paintings into the walls of the Curia. One was a work by Nikias, which showed a personification of Nemea seated upon the lion, holding a palm-leaf, with an old man standing to the side and a painting-within-a-painting of a chariot; the other, by Philocares, represented two men, a father and son, with an eagle and snake flying above.⁴⁷ We need not read the display of all of these materials as programmatic, but may nevertheless note that they played upon themes salient in Octavian's public self-fashioning. Philocares' painting, for example, emphasized the relationship between fathers and sons. Pliny says that it was remarkable specifically because the family relationship was visible in the figures' faces. The depiction of Nemea played up the theme of victory and its

celebration. Some, moreover, think this painting was an antique once owned by Sulla.⁴⁸ Apparent in all cases is that Octavian made a point to return to public and divine ownership goods once taken from the people. Although these spoils were diverse, all supported his broader urban program.

While the triumphal displays of 29 BCE celebrated Egypt as a vanquished foe, it is clear that there were problems on the ground in the newly won province. At the death of Cleopatra, Ptolemaic Egypt extended to the territories of the first cataract, an area abundant in mineral resources, including gold fields, gem mines, and quarries. The border had been more or less stable throughout the Ptolemaic period, the resource-rich lands beyond Aswan governed under a tacit “co-regency” between the Ptolemies and rulers of the kingdom of Kush.⁴⁹ The first signs of trouble appear to have come from within Egypt, in the form of internal revolts by local leaders in the Thebaid, followed quickly by challenges from Meroe to the south. We are able to reconstruct the events in large part on the basis of material evidence, victory monuments in Egypt celebrating Rome’s rule erected by Octavian’s general and friend, Cornelius Gallus.

Before his appointment as the *praefectus aegypti*, Gallus belonged to a number of elite social circles. He was a poet of some note, his work known from a few verses attested on a papyrus from the border town of Qasr Ibrim.⁵⁰ Early on, he was a partisan of Mark Antony, but changed his allegiances to follow Octavian and proved himself indispensable during the siege of Alexandria. He held the post of *praefectus aegypti* for only a few scant years. In 26 BCE, the senate recalled him to Rome on charges of corruption, and he committed suicide. Although Augustus reportedly wept at the loss of his friend, ancient authors assumed that this scandal indicated that Gallus was making a play for power in Egypt. Dio, for example, accuses him of outlandish behavior, saying that he set up images of himself everywhere in Egypt and wrote a list of his accomplishments on the pyramids.⁵¹ This vivid accusation takes much of its charge from the fact that Romans considered pyramids to be “kingly” monuments, but the archaeological record does not substantiate these claims. Gallus did, however, commission two victory monuments that may be considered in this context: the obelisk that stands today in the Piazza San Pietro in Rome and a commemorative stele from Philae, providing an account of his military exploits in Latin, Greek, and the hieroglyphic script.

Gallus erected the obelisk in the “Forum Iulium” in Alexandria or perhaps in the newly founded Nikopolis.⁵² [Figure 2.5] The inscription consisted of bronze letters affixed to the obelisk base, reconstructed on the basis of the nail holes left behind. It read: “On the order of the emperor Caesar, son of a *divus*, C. Cornelius Gallus son of Gnaeus, *praefectus fabrum* of Caesar son of a *divus*, made the Forum Iulium.”⁵³ The inconsistency with Gallus’ later titles as governor of the province suggests a date in 30 or 29 BCE. Yet the removal of the inscription and repurposing of the obelisk and its base (both brought to



FIGURE 2.5. The obelisk in Piazza San Pietro (commissioned, Fifth Dynasty, c. 2450–300) brought to Alexandria and erected by Gallus (30/29 BCE), re-erected in Rome by Caligula (37–41 CE).

Photo credit: author.

Rome by Caligula) mean we know little of its setting in Egypt. That the work was completed so quickly suggests that the obelisk had already been brought down the Nile to Alexandria, whether by Cleopatra and Antony or an earlier ruler.

The second victory monument, a commemorative stele from Philae and clearly a new commission, tells us a great deal more. The stele was found in 1896, broken in two pieces and reused as the foundation for an altar in the Temple of Augustus on Philae, constructed in 13/12 BCE. Its dedication by Gallus can be dated with precision to a few months before the triple triumph in Rome, April 16, 29 BCE. [Figure 2.6] Although it was not long on public view, this monument provides a fascinating window into the post-Actian period in Egypt. Inscribed on rose granite, it adopts an Egyptian form long used by kings to publicize their military exploits to proclaim instead Roman victories in and beyond the province.⁵⁴ The stele features a traditional winged

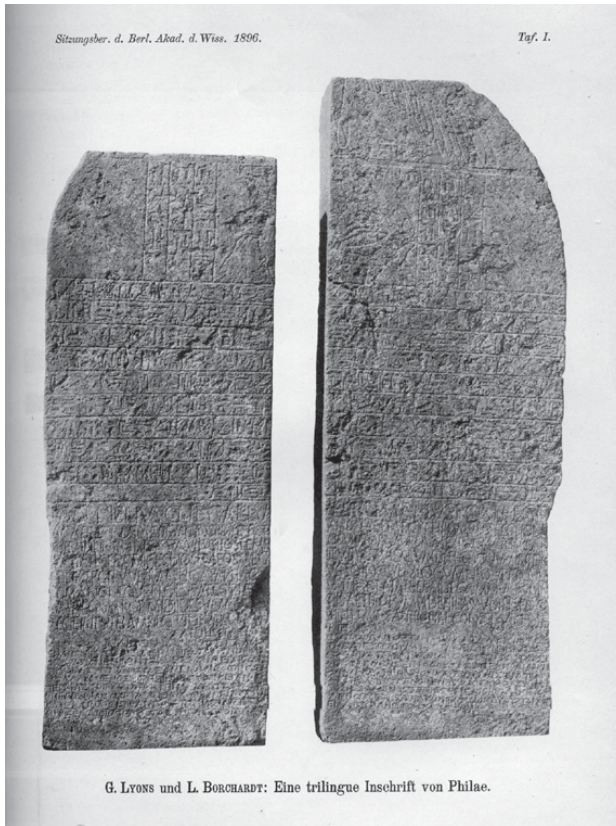


FIGURE 2.6. The trilingual inscription of Gallus at the time of its discovery (created c. 29 BCE, reused c. 13/12 BCE in the pavement of the Temple of Augustus, Philae).

Photo credit: G. Lyons and L. Borchardt 1896, Taf I.

solar disk with a representation of a horseman killing an armed soldier, reminiscent of Roman and Greek triumphal imagery and sometimes taken to represent Gallus himself. The stele's three texts tell of events at some point in the year between the battle of Alexandria and the triumphal celebrations, stating that Gallus quashed rebellions in a number of Egyptian towns, including Coptos, Ceramice, Diospolis Megale, and Opheion. Directly afterward, he took the Roman legions to the borderlands for a meeting with the Ethiopian kings. The precise chronology is difficult to reconstruct, for Gallus' dealings with the rebels and Ethiopians are somewhat conflated in the three documents, each of which conveys the information with different emphasis.⁵⁵ Even a quick look at the Latin text shows why Gallus is believed by some to have overstepped his bounds. It gives Gallus' full name, career, and filiation. "Gaius Cornelius Gallus, the son of Gnaeus, an *eques*, the first *praefectus* of Aegyptus and Alexandria, after the kings were defeated by Caesar the son of the *divus*," and concludes by stating that, after everything was resolved, he accepted the Ethiopian kings *in tutelam*.⁵⁶ This implies a diplomatic

agreement, and uses language suggestive of a relationship of political patronage.⁵⁷ Recent work, taking careful stock also of Kushite sources, suggests the political and military situation was far from simple and that a number of parties acting independently were involved.⁵⁸ In discussing later hostilities, Strabo relates that the Ethiopians claimed local nomarchs instigated hostilities. Thus, it is possible that the Egyptians were fronting attacks on both the Romans and Meroe, and that Gallus was negotiating difficult waters.⁵⁹ Yet for all that, the Latin text on the monument stresses that Gallus' authority derives from Octavian. Difficulties in interpretation can be explained by his need to speak simultaneously to a number of audiences, including Roman soldiers, Egyptian priests, and others resident in Egypt or visiting the sacred lands of Philae.

Gallus was replaced, in succession, by Aelius Gallus and then by Gaius Petronius. But the troubles at the southern border were still not entirely resolved. The best source for the later hostilities is Strabo, who had firsthand knowledge of the region and traveled with Aelius Gallus. He relates that after Cornelius Gallus' initial successes, Kushite forces took advantage of the redeployment of a Roman legion to Arabia to occupy the first cataract, storming the garrison at Syene. They enslaved the town's residents and tore down statues of the emperor. Strabo downplays the event, insisting that the Ethiopian peoples beyond Rome's borders were peaceful and non-threatening, under control and easily controlled. Nevertheless, his account preserves a sense of the shock that attended the seizure and dismemberment of statues of the emperor by a foreign power.⁶⁰

The discovery in 1910 of a portrait head of Augustus at the site of ancient Meroe has long been connected with this conflict, its interment taken as symbolic of Kushite resistance to the Romans. The head, once part of a full-length cuirassed statue, was discovered ritually buried beneath the steps of Building 22 in Meroe, a temple decorated with scenes of the subjugation of Roman soldiers.⁶¹ [Figure 2.7] The bronze head is majestic, over life-size and of high quality. It belongs to the type best exemplified in the Primaporta.⁶² Its discovery not only provides some confirmation of Strabo's historical account, but speaks to the deliberate integration of even far-flung territories into the imperium. Statues of this type were first disseminated in 27 BCE, when Octavian formally took the name of Augustus. Erected in a remote border town in Egypt within a year or so of the type's creation, the bronze portrait was an up-to-the-minute reflection of the emperor's political image set at the outermost margin of his authority. Its destruction was no light offense, and had the potential to be embarrassing. The Parthian capture of Roman army standards, also symbolic of Roman authority and military prowess, lived in collective memory from 53 BCE, when they were taken in battle from the Roman general Crassus, until their negotiated return more than thirty years later. Their recovery in 20 BCE was widely celebrated in contemporary literary and



FIGURE 2.7. The bronze head of Augustus from Meroe (c. 27 BCE).

Photo credit: © Trustees of the British Museum.

visual sources, including on the cuirass of the Prima porta, and eventually by Augustus in his *Res Gestae*.⁶³

This conflict, at its core, stemmed from a failure of the Ethiopians to recognize Augustus' regency. One sore point was that even as the Ethiopians tore down statues of the emperor, they acted as if the nomarchs were the leaders of the region. The desecration of the statues was therefore a challenge not just to the empire's claim on certain territory but to the visual rhetoric of the principate. In the end, the border disputes were resolved diplomatically, but only after the formal recognition of Augustus as the head of the Roman state by the Ethiopians. Candace, the queen of Meroe, and Augustus met in person to negotiate the new boundary at Pselchis. For this meeting, the emperor required the queen to travel to Samos to meet him, a demonstration of the vast interior expanse of the Roman empire. This concession made, Augustus offered her reasonable terms.⁶⁴ It is difficult to say how widely these events were known in Rome. At some point after his disgrace, Gallus' stele was deliberately broken; the bronze letters of his inscription on the obelisk in the "Forum Iulium" were removed. Certainly, Gallus' disgrace was a source of disquiet to his contemporaries, but beyond this scandal, the troubles in southern Egypt appear not to have been of much concern or even widely known. Strabo's account was not finished until the reign of Tiberius. Nevertheless, the unsettled state of Roman rule in southern Egypt during the post-Actian

period provides vital context for understanding the display of the two monumental obelisks in Rome a few years later.

The value of looking at victory celebrations from Rome and Egypt together is manifold. They reflect differing perspectives on conquest, each conditioned to a particular audience. Those from Rome celebrate the fall of Alexandria and Egypt's annexation as a matter of fact. Thus, as noted above, Propertius could describe the personified Nile in Augustus' triumph as weak, *debilis*, an adjective that implies old age, infirmity, and frailty. Those from Egypt reveal the decade after conquest as a time of political tension, reflected in monuments that repurpose traditional visual symbols of kingship to pay homage to the new political authority of the empire. They foreshadow many of the solutions to the problem of how to persuade those in and out of the province of the legitimacy of Roman control. The decade following peace with the kingdom of Kush saw slow but steady implementation of policies intended to solidify the emperor's image in Egypt. Augustus made concessions to Egyptian tradition in adopting a more kingly title, albeit one that shows he was never formally crowned according to Egyptian ritual precedent. He abandoned early epithets that attempted to describe him in more Roman terms, such as "Kaisaros the conqueror" or "God who is son of a God," notably similar to the way he is named in both of Gallus' Latin inscriptions.⁶⁵ He sponsored new temple construction, renovating or building brand new structures at sites where there had been unrest, among them El-Qal'a, near Coptos in the Thebaid, and in the area of the first cataract, at Kalabasha, Dendur, and Philae (of which the Gallus monument formed the pavement, reduced to the value of its material). To this second decade, too, belong the first plans to move more obelisks from Heliopolis, including the two known as "Cleopatra's Needles," intended for the Caesareum in Alexandria, dedicated in 13/12 BCE, and the two bound for Rome, dedicated in 10/9 BCE.

Although it is easy to think about the display of Augustus' obelisks in their intended settings as *faits accomplis*, that they were dedicated three years after those in Alexandria shows that the process of their removal and re-installation required significant resources and time for planning. Their erection in Rome was the culmination of a number of productive acts: the selection of the obelisks and their removal from their original foundations, unharmed; the quarrying (or repurposing) of new granite for the bases; the engineering of ships to carry them across the Mediterranean; their transportation overland or by river to Rome; and only then their preparation and installation in the Campus Martius and Circus Maximus.⁶⁶ For Pliny, moving the obelisks to Rome was an act even more amazing than their original quarrying, and his account allows us to flesh out this process, although much must necessarily remain speculative. Although the obelisks were taken from Heliopolis in the Delta, the ability to re-erect them was tied in some measure to control of the quarry sites near Aswan. Pliny's account may suggest that the weights

used to counterbalance the obelisks on the transport ships were made of rose granite.⁶⁷ The new bases, more to the point, are of the same material. Monuments like the victory stele at Philae show that Romans had access to the quarries soon after annexation. Although most of the documentation for the organization of the quarries at Syene and in the eastern desert is later in date, available evidence suggests that the military aided in managing these resources under Augustus, and that the systems for their organization were in a state of flux.⁶⁸ The eventual display of the obelisks in Rome, then, required the mobilization of almost incalculable resources and manpower at a time when there was a fervor of activity in Egypt following the final resolution of hostilities with the Kingdom of Kush.

There can be no doubt that the obelisks celebrated the military conquest of Egypt and the transfer of Egypt's lands, people, and resources into Roman hands. Yet the lapse of time between the triumphal celebrations of conquest in Italy and the obelisks' eventual arrival in Rome means we must consider them in equal measure as elements of Augustus' more mature policies regarding Egypt and his second wave of urban improvements in Rome. In the interim, too, a healthy interest in the arts and culture of Egypt had already taken hold in the private sphere.

KINGLY MONUMENTS IN THE ROMAN CITY: THE TOMB OF CESTIUS AND THE EGYPTIAN AESTHETIC

The Augustan campaign of urban beautification, funded by public and private initiative, meant that Rome was now a world center for the literary and visual arts. New constructions transformed the Palatine hill into a seat of power rivaling the Ptolemaic court in activity, if not grandeur. Although Augustus' own house was modest, the nearby porticoes were luxurious and bathed in marble. These renovations effected a fundamental shift in the location of political power. At times, the emperor convened the Senate not in the curia but on the Palatine, as if calling them to a *salutatio* in his own home.⁶⁹ Nearby libraries housed Greek and Latin works. Although implicit, the suggestion that the new Rome had supplanted Alexandria was pointed. The *Acta Alexandrinorum* record that in 13/12 BCE Augustus received visiting dignitaries from Alexandria in the Latin, not the Greek, wing of his library on the Palatine.⁷⁰

More than in any other period, the references to Egypt in the visual and literary arts of Augustan Rome seem to reflect a popular fascination spurred by current events, an interest which spanned both the public and private spheres. Poets alluded to the death of Cleopatra and explored the place of Egyptian deities in the pantheon; images of pharaohs, exotic animals, worshippers, and



FIGURE 2.8. Nero antico herm from the Palatine in archaizing style (c. 28 BCE).

Photo credit: author, courtesy: Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali – Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma.

deities appear in fresco and luxury-ware. Yet, as a phenomenon, these varied celebrations of or engagements with Egyptian culture are difficult to categorize neatly. As Magdalene Söldner has argued, visual motifs sometimes celebrate Egyptian religion and culture, and sometimes seem more akin to an ancient colonialism, that is, a celebration of Rome's control of Egypt.⁷¹ While born of the influx of wealth following annexation, visual references to Egypt should not be understood to have solely political resonance and certainly should not be taken by themselves as statements of their patrons' personal or religious identification; rather, they spoke to the creative experimentation with form that characterized the Augustan floruit in the private and public arts, a decidedly eclectic and worldly aesthetic.⁷² One of the Palatine porticoes, for example, included representations of the Danaids, an overt appropriation of an "Egyptian" myth of special interest to contemporary poets: the Danaids killed their husbands, the sons of Aegyptus, in an act of loyalty to their own father; in punishment, they were required to work ceaselessly to fill



FIGURE 2.9. The pyramid of Cestius, east face (18–12 BCE).

Photo credit: author.

leaking water-jugs or *pithoi*.⁷³ Yet the extant sculptures from the Palatine do not adopt an Egyptian mien, inspired instead by archaic kourai.⁷⁴ [Figure 2.8] Importantly, much of this cultural activity predates the transportation and display of Augustus' obelisks in Rome. Here, I will look in depth at one especially rich early example of the use of an archetypal Egyptian form in the memorial of Gaius Cestius, built nearly a decade before the erection of the obelisks in Rome.

The tomb, built between 18 and 12 BCE, took the form of a massive isosceles pyramid (28.5 meters on a side and 36.8 meters at the apex). [Figure 2.9] The monument had a poured-concrete core, revetted on the exterior with slabs of luna marble.⁷⁵ Freestanding columns stood at each of the corners, and two bronze statues of Cestius also stood at the base. There was a small interior burial chamber decorated with frescos, among the earliest datable examples of "Third Style" decoration.⁷⁶ In addition, there were a number of inscriptions associated with the monument, including a formal epitaph providing Cestius' name, tribal affiliation, and *cursus honorum*, and two documentary inscriptions, set up by Cestius' executors and heirs.⁷⁷

As Caroline Vout has shown, most scholars have approached the monument first and foremost as Egyptian, thereby assuming (tacitly or explicitly) that its design marked it as foreign and therefore un-Roman.⁷⁸ Others, treating the monument in passing, have suggested that its form referred to

Augustus' military triumphs – that is, they have assumed that political events inspired the selection of its foreign theme.⁷⁹ Certainly, the monument was unusual, intended to attract attention by design. Yet its very success at this endeavor has complicated our understanding of its place in the Augustan city. The monument's form was so notable that it attracted the notice of antiquarians as early as the Middle Ages. A visitor to Rome in the twelfth or thirteenth century claimed it was the resting place of Augustus and remarked on its perfect condition, untarnished by time.⁸⁰ Later on, Renaissance antiquarians called it the “Meta Remi” and likened its shape to the turning posts in the ancient circus. They also described two other monuments as *metae*, causing some confusion. There was a “Meta Marcelli” near the Via Ripetta and the Piazza del Popolo, and the “Meta Romuli” in the Vatican necropolis. On the basis of these descriptions, scholars have sometimes argued that Cestius' tomb was not unique, that there were a number of contemporary monuments of pyramidal form.⁸¹ Yet Ronald Ridley has argued forcefully on the basis of contemporary visual depictions that neither monument was an isosceles pyramid: the “Meta Romuli” had eight faces, not four; the “Meta Marcelli” had a rectangular or square base but nothing is known of its super-structure.⁸² In other words, all of these monuments drew the antiquarian eye and were assimilated to the mythology of Rome, but they did not take the same architectural form. (The only known examples of pyramids adorning Roman burials are in fact much later: two small tombs from the Isola Sacra necropolis featured pyramids of brick and concrete, and a tomb from the province Numidia was called a *pyramis* in a funerary inscription.⁸³) Thus, the pyramid-shaped tomb of Cestius was unusual in Augustan Rome, and may have been unique. Unusual does not, however, entail countercultural. Vout suggests, rightly in my view, that the form of the pyramid appealed because it was widely understood to be appropriate to a memorial, drawing on Egypt as a timeless and otherworldly place.⁸⁴ The choice of an eye-arresting form accords well with the late Republican and early imperial penchant for tombs that used concrete cores to support immense superstructures and sometimes took playful and innovative shapes.⁸⁵ Let us first, then, set the monument's Egyptian-ness to one side, considering it instead as a memorial constructed for the sole purpose of commemorating its patron.

The tomb occupied a prominent site at the juncture of two roads outside the Augustan city: the much-trafficked suburban vein of the Via Ostiensis, which led to the city center by way of the commercial districts, and a smaller street that ran through the Porta Rauduscula past the Circus Maximus toward the residential regions of the Caelian, Oppian, and Velian hills. [Figure 2.10] From the formal perspective of its design, the four-sided pyramid offered a clever solution to the constraints of this site by giving impressive views to all sides and both streets, thus ensuring that Cestius' memorial would attract attention. Only on close inspection was the eastern face revealed as the

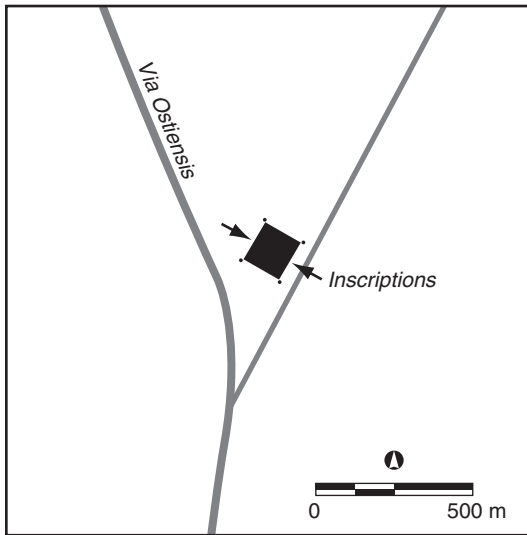


FIGURE 2.10. The pyramid of Cestius (18–12 BCE), relative to Augustan streets.

Drawing credit: Karen Rasmussen, Archeographics (modified from Haselberger 2002, map detail).

“front.” Both the east and west sides were inscribed with identical epitaphs in large letters, but the eastern face also bore an additional inscription added by the executors.

Both faces of the monument refer to Cestius’ will (*testamentum*), a document that seems not only to have divided up his worldly goods, but also to have included specific plans for his memorial, including imposing a deadline by which its construction must be completed. The epitaph gave Cestius’ name and *cursus honorum*, and the inscription on the statue base told how his heirs had carried out his instructions:

On both sides: Gaius Cestius Epulo, son of Lucius, of the Pobilia tribe, praetor, *tribunus plebis*, *septemvir epulonum*.

South-east side only: The work was completed from the will in 330 days, by the direction of his heir Pontius Mela, son of Pontius of the Claudia tribe, and Pothus, a freedman.⁸⁶

Statue bases: Marcus Valerius Messalla Corvinus, P. Rutilius Lupus, Lucius Iunius Silanus, Lucius Pontius Mela, Decimus Marcus Niger, the heirs of C. Cestius, and Lucius Cestius, from which part of the inheritance of his brother came to him from a gift of Marcus Agrippa, from that money which they received according to their own shares from the sale of the *attalica* which it was not permitted to them to bring into the tomb of C. Cestius according to his will, according to the edict of the aediles.⁸⁷

Cestius’ heirs were all prominent men active in the early empire and late Republic: the orator Marcus Valerius Messalla Corvinus, patron of the arts

and friend of Augustus;⁸⁸ Publius Rutilius Lupus;⁸⁹ Lucius Iunius Silanus, tribune of the plebs in 57 BCE and praetor in 49 BCE;⁹⁰ Lucius Pontius Mela; Decimus Marius Niger; Lucius Cestius, Gaius' brother, known from his own memorial (and whose son was active in the city's political life in the early Tiberian period);⁹¹ and Marcus Agrippa, the famous general and the emperor's right-hand man, whose death in 11 BCE allows us to date the monument.⁹² Roman law governing funerals, inheritances, and the construction of memorials was complex, but most jurists took it as fact that the heirs to an estate were obligated to prioritize expenditures for funerals and memorials over their own legacies and even over other outstanding debts.⁹³ Testators could detail how these memorials were to be built, organized, and decorated, even leaving blueprints to be followed. An inscription from Perugia, for instance, includes a floorplan complete with suggested measurements.⁹⁴ The inscriptions in this case reveal as well that Cestius left behind instructions regarding the grave goods, namely that *attalica* be interred in his tomb; although rare, the word likely refers to gold-embroidered fabric, so called because of a type of workmanship associated with the Attalid court.⁹⁵ The aediles forbade the request, and the heirs sold the tapestries at auction and used the proceeds to pay for the two bronze portraits instead (a clear indication of the worth of the fabric). All in all, then, the inscriptions reveal that Cestius left behind precise and specific instructions for his tomb and that his memorial pushed the boundaries of propriety – not, however, because of its Egyptian form but because of ostentatious expenditures. Considering the intentions behind Cestius' request to be buried with *attalica* underscores this point.

Pliny says that L. Scipio and Cn. Manlius first brought *vestes attalicae* to Rome in the early second century BCE, citing them as an example of stunning extravagance: Pompey's portrait entirely made of pearls was as wondrous to the Romans of 55 BCE as had been the imported brocades a few generations before.⁹⁶ By the first century CE, similar garments were made in Italy, and thus we can assume that contemporary audiences had some awareness of them.⁹⁷ Propertius says, for example, that there were *attalica* displayed in the Porticus of Pompey, probably to be understood as tapestries decorating its walls.⁹⁸ Yet Propertius' *attalica* are metaphors as much as real objects, symbols of luxury beyond the reach of a normal person. He also mentions them in his elegy for Marcellus, saying that death comes whether a man is rich or poor. Even those who dress in *attalica* will be given to the funeral pyre.⁹⁹ This context renders all the more notable the fact that Cestius not only owned such fabric, but wanted it buried with him, whether as clothing or wall hangings. That the aediles refused the request, however, shows that he ran afoul of public law. To inter articles of clothing or personal effects was lawful, though perhaps considered gauche.¹⁰⁰ Strictures dating back even to the Twelve Tables, however, forbade burying gold, with exceptions made only for gold teeth and fillings. More recent sumptuary legislation under Julius Caesar, too, had

specifically targeted imported wares and clothing.¹⁰¹ Whether or not Cestius knew of these laws and their likely effect, he expressed in no uncertain terms his intention to be buried with the best and the finest around him.

The question arises, then, how the Egyptian-ness of the pyramid enhanced Cestius' intended memorial. To answer it, we must explore what Romans in Italy would have known of the Egyptian monuments. First, it is important to recognize that the word "pyramid" is of Greek origin and may or may not accord with how the Egyptians who constructed these monuments named or conceived of them. In Egyptian, the tombs were perhaps called *m.r.*, "the place of ascent," suggesting that the form helped assure the afterlife of the king; the Greek *πυραμῖς* may derive from *pr.m.ws*, a term that referred to the height of the structure.¹⁰² The Latin word *pyramis* (and rarely, *pyramida*) derives from this coinage. Roman authors used the term synonymously to refer both to the tombs of Egyptian kings and to geometric shapes with square bases and triangular sides.¹⁰³ The image of these massive, expensive monuments provided fertile ground for poetic play. Horace, for example, concluded the third volume of his odes with a poem that compared his work favorably to a pyramid, "I have completed a monument [*monumentum*] more lasting than bronze and higher than a pyramid of regal bearing."¹⁰⁴ Here, the recognition of the form as intended to commemorate the deceased, and a royal personage at that, is explicit. For later poets, too, pyramids conjured regal tombs of unsurpassed grandeur.¹⁰⁵ Thus, it is a fair assumption that many Romans could have understood the distinctive shape, even in the abstract, as evoking a tomb fit for royalty.

Ancient historians also knew of the pyramids. Of Roman-period authors, Diodorus Siculus, Strabo, and Pliny discussed them at considerable length, each in service of a particular agenda. All three ranked the Egyptian pyramids as astounding feats of human ingenuity, noting their immense scale and the close to incalculable resources and manpower required for their construction.¹⁰⁶ At the same time, all three also betray some discomfort with the expense and absolute political power that they represent. In Diodorus' view, they reflect better on their architects and designers than on the Egyptian kings who commissioned them.¹⁰⁷ Although Pliny calls them wonders, *miracula*, his moralizing tone is even more emphatic: the pyramids are overly ostentatious and a foolish use of resources.¹⁰⁸ All three close their accounts with different versions of a common story about the smallest pyramid at Giza, either built in honor of or by a woman named Rhodopis. The tale had been in currency in some form since before the days of Herodotus, who dismissed it, arguing that while Rhodopis had existed, the monument was not built in her honor nor was she possessed of means enough to build it for herself.¹⁰⁹ In Pliny's version, she is a prostitute who was a slave in the same household as Aesop and was his common-law wife. She constructed the monument using the proceeds of her ignoble profession.¹¹⁰ In Strabo's telling, an Egyptian king built

the monument for Rhodopis, smitten with love for her when an eagle stole her sandal while she was bathing and dropped it in his lap. In Diodorus, her paramours were the nomarchs of Egypt, who pooled their resources to erect the monument in her honor.¹¹¹ Despite the different particulars, for all three authors the story serves to invert the symbolism of the pyramid as it reflects Egyptian political power. In Diodorus' account, Rhodopis stands in place of the king as the local governors pay her homage; for Strabo, the king submits to a lust that breaches propriety and undermines his authority. For all three authors, too, this pyramid was the *last* ever built in Egypt, testimony to the fading power of the Egyptian dynasts. These literary accounts provide useful context for understanding Cestius' memorial, for they illustrate a broad awareness of the pyramids as Egyptian in origin, funerary in function, evocative of great wealth, and above all ancient. Conversely, there was no awareness of the form-as-function valued by the Egyptians, ensuring the afterlife of the interred.

In sum, Cestius intended his memorial to be a modern-day wonder of the world: gleaming with white marble, occupying a site that guaranteed it would attract notice, decorated inside and out with the latest fashions. It was a memorial fit for a prince, designed by and for a man intimately connected to the city's ruling elite. The tomb's Egyptian form was part of that message and illustrates a powerful and positive association between Egyptian goods, visual forms, and eastern luxury.

However unusual the adoption of foreign style may appear, it was also complementary to broader aesthetics current in Rome, which pushed the boundaries of antiquarian taste by exploring different (and therefore new) sources of inspiration, drawn from other cultures, both present and past. Horace predicated his claims to poetic immortality – that his work would outlast bronze and rise higher than the pyramids – on the originality of his meters, which he based on those of the archaic poets Sappho and Alcaeus.¹¹² In the visual arts, retrospective innovation could take a number of forms, from close replication to free adaptation. The caryatids from the Forum of Augustus were closely based on those of the Erechtheion in Athens, modified to three-quarter scale. These, combined with creative updatings of Athenian style, such as found on the friezes of the Ara Pacis, likened the new Rome to Athens in its heyday.¹¹³ In the private sphere, visual quotation could be more playful, bringing together a wide range of motifs. So, for example, the wealthy embraced interior decorations that adopted funerary motifs and color palettes from Greek art to wall paintings. The panel paintings of the Villa at Farnesina featured motifs drawn from funerary stelae and white-ground lekythoi, complete with an appropriate color palette, and joined by all manner of other exotic motifs, including depictions of Egyptian gods and goddesses.¹¹⁴

Understood within this context, Egyptian-looking motifs or forms were not simply references to Egypt, especially when part of larger, carefully composed

schemes, as in the memorial of Cestius. They were part of a worldly aesthetic that explored the place of Augustan Rome relative to the storied past, looking not to only one period or place but to many.¹¹⁵ This taste for the foreign and the ancient partly defines the aesthetic that conditioned the cultural environment into which Augustus' obelisks were set, to which those monuments responded, and on which they embellished and expanded.

EDUCATING ROMAN EYES: AUGUSTUS' OBELISKS, DESCRIBED IN ROME

What might an educated person living in the city of Rome in the first century CE and the centuries after have understood about Augustus' Egyptian obelisks? Were their Egyptian histories and symbolism deemed important? It is a common observation that the two accounts that directly treat the obelisks in Rome, written in the first century CE by Pliny the Elder and the fourth century CE by Ammianus Marcellinus, place more emphasis on their reuse than their Egyptian symbolism, casting the Roman ability to move and manipulate these monuments as close to miraculous.¹¹⁶ There can be little doubt that the Roman display of the monuments was foremost in the minds of those who wrote about them. Yet a closer look at the descriptions reveals, at the same time, that both authors made a considerable effort to alert Roman viewers to complexities inherent in the Egyptian monuments through comparisons between these foreign objects and more familiar symbols, shapes, and materials.

Pliny first introduces his readers to the forms and decoration of the exotic monuments through visual analogy:

The kings made great beams of this material, in a spirit of competition, calling them "obelisks," which were dedicated to the divine spirit of the sun. Its symbolism is as representation of [the sun's] rays, and this is signified indeed by its name in Egypt. Mespheres [i.e., Thutmose III], who ruled in the city of the sun, first of all [the kings] built it [an obelisk], having been ordered in a dream; and this itself was inscribed on it, for as a matter of fact those sculptures and representations we see on them are Egyptian letters.¹¹⁷

In part, Pliny's intention is to render the form of the obelisk understandable; he both acknowledges what a Roman viewer would actually see – what would appear noteworthy upon confrontation with an unknown monument – and then proceeds to elaborate its shape, function, and meaning. He educates the reader's eyes. He first describes the shafts of obelisks with the word *trabs*, literally tree-trunk, approximating the columnar shape of the obelisk and conveying the notion that the stone was a single piece. The material is rose granite, which, as he notes in the section just before this passage, was also good for the grinding of cosmetics. He knows that it came from the area of Syene, modern Aswan, in the Thebaid.¹¹⁸ After his

explication of the form and its material, he explains the obelisks' Egyptian purpose as sacred to the sun; the word he uses here, *numen*, connotes a divine will or force, stressing the real and present power of the obelisk in an unfamiliar worldview. He also attempts to show how that function was at once sacred, a votive, and also symbolic, "as effigy of its [the sun's] rays." Thus, Pliny offers a reasonable translation of the Egyptian word for obelisk and a (largely) accurate account of the form's symbolism and function.¹¹⁹ Finally, Pliny explains that the hieroglyphs on its sides are Egyptian texts. His descriptions of the hieroglyphs as *effigies* and *sculpturae*, images and carved ornaments, suggests that Romans might otherwise have attributed a purely decorative function to the characters. With hieroglyphs understood as letters, Italian viewers would have seen an obelisk as an inscribed and interactive monument, itself able to speak.¹²⁰

Two assumptions underlie these explications. First, Pliny assumes that without aid his readers would not recognize those features critical to the monument's symbolism: as monolith, cultic representation, text, and emblem of the office of Egyptian kingship. Second, he assumes that the Egyptian monument persists in its new location, its Egyptian significance neither made irrelevant nor wholly eclipsed by the act of appropriation. This assumption is revealed, for example, in Pliny's description of the Montecitorio obelisk: "to the one in the Campus, the divine Augustus *added* a miraculous use."¹²¹

After his introduction to the form of the obelisk, Pliny provides a catalogue of specific examples, including those of Egyptian pharaohs, Ptolemaic monarchs, and Roman emperors. In one sense, his account is comprehensive, discussing all those on view in the Rome of his day. In another sense, it is selective. Pliny lists, of those still standing in Egypt, only obelisks particularly notable to him because of their provenance (Heliopolis, which he renders literally, *in urbe Solis*, "in the city of the sun," fundamental to their meaning as he understands it), remarkable size, or symbolic performance of kingship. Although his account appears eclectic, its organization roughly follows the physical path of the monuments transported to Rome. He begins in Heliopolis with the first erection of the obelisks; he proceeds down-river to Alexandria, where many were brought by the Ptolemies; finally, he discusses their removal to Rome in mammoth seafaring ships, themselves worthy of admiration. He notes, for example, that Augustus moored one at Puteoli, where it could be toured by the curious, until it at last burned down.¹²² In tracing this path, Pliny moves the obelisks forward in time and nearer in space from their ancient and remote origins in Egypt to their present locations in Rome. Pliny even attempts to orient readers to unfamiliar Egyptian kings by giving them comparative markers of chronology, indicating that one king was roughly contemporary with the Trojan War, another with Pythagoras. In so doing, he acknowledges the Roman use of the monuments without ever denying the importance of their individual Egyptian pasts, or the

strong connections between those pasts and their present lives. He remains interested in and relates stories about these works in their Egyptian contexts, making sure to give information about, for example, the original patron who commissioned each.

In his account, Pliny famously confused the heights and Egyptian patrons of Augustus' two obelisks, saying that Psametik II commissioned that in the Circus Maximus, rather than that in the Campus Martius:

The one which the divine Augustus set up in the great circus was quarried by the king Psemetnepserphreus, during whose reign Pythagoras was in Egypt. In addition to its base, of the very same stone, it was eighty five and three quarters feet tall. That one, however, which [he placed] in the Campus Martius, smaller by nine feet, [was quarried by] Sesothis. Having been inscribed, both contain the interpretation of the nature of things [*rerum naturae*] in the philosophy of the Egyptians.¹²³

Psemetnepserphreus, the name he uses for Psametik II, derives from transliterations of the king's Egyptian name, Psametik, and his "good" name Neferibre, "the heart of Re is beautiful."¹²⁴ This rendering of the king's name differs significantly from the way in which Psametik II was named in historical sources that Pliny would have had access to, where he was Psmouthis or Psammis.¹²⁵ Yet both appellations, Psametik and Neferibre, can be found in the text of the Montecitorio obelisk. (That the name is imperfectly transliterated as Psemetnepserphreus reflects the post-antique manuscript tradition. Of the extant manuscripts, most differ to a greater or lesser extent in their rendering of the name, unsurprising because of its unusual spelling.¹²⁶) Similarly, Pliny's rendering of the name of Sesothis may derive from the text on the Piazza del Popolo obelisk, which bears the name of Sety I, *sthy*. Here, too, Pliny is somewhat at odds with the Greek tradition. Manetho, as preserved in Josephus' first century text the *Contra Apionem*, calls the king "Sethos, also known as Ramesses" (Σέθως ὁ καὶ Ῥαμέσσης). Another manuscript of Josephus, however, contains a note in the margin that suggests an alternate reading, "Sethosis and Ramesses" (Σέθωσις καὶ Ῥαμέσσης) and says that they are brothers, perhaps based on a different textual tradition that may reflect the name of a king found in Herodotus, Sesostris, usually identified with Senwosret.¹²⁷ This uncertainty suggests that, even for Josephus and his scholiasts, there was some confusion over how the name should be written and how it accorded with other accounts of Egyptian history. In any case, we do not gain much from the attempt to reconcile Pliny's kings with those in other sources. Although he mentions a number of Greek historians in his bibliography for Book 36, we do not know if he made this connection. It may be more profitable to consider Pliny's Sethosis to be the same as his own Sesothis, mentioned earlier in his text as having erected fourteen obelisks in Egypt.¹²⁸ The critical point is that Pliny shows an interest in the history of the Egyptian kings and had access to some knowledge

of sources outside the Greek historiographic tradition, perhaps even derived from the Egyptian texts of obelisks themselves. How exactly Pliny acquired this specialized knowledge is unclear, for by the first century CE the ability to read hieroglyphs was limited to an elite priestly class even in Egypt. We must accordingly assume an intermediary, a translator, or a written translation.¹²⁹ While we do not know for certain whether the Montecitorio obelisk's text was ever translated for the Roman audience, it is clear, as discussed later in this chapter, that the text of the Piazza del Popolo obelisk was translated and published in the city of Rome.

Most significantly, despite his "errors" in understanding, Pliny consistently provides his readers with information about the Egyptian patrons of the obelisks in his catalogue, a clear indication that he sees the monoliths as individual monuments with unique histories that endure beyond their appropriation. Further, he stresses that, despite their decorative appearance, the foreign letters convey Egyptian philosophy. For some, Pliny's statement that the obelisks told of "the nature of things" is an indication that he naively took the hieroglyphs, representations of animals, as relating information about the birds and beasts they resembled.¹³⁰ We would do well to remember that for Pliny, however, a phrase like *interpretatio naturae rerum*, "the interpretation of the nature of things," was not used lightly. If anything, it evokes his own purpose, which he described as setting forth "the nature of things [*natura rerum*], that is, life."¹³¹

Centuries later, Ammianus Marcellinus wrote his own history in Rome. His account shows that he too had quite detailed firsthand knowledge of the obelisks not only in the Rome of his day, but also in Egyptian contexts:

In this city [Alexandria], among the vast sanctuaries and diverse colossal works portraying the countenances of Egyptian deities, I have seen many obelisks, some thrown down and smashed. When a population was conquered in war, the kings – elated by the favorable outcome of critical affairs – offered these things as dedications, having cut them out of the veins of the mountains, [veins] sought out even among those residents of the very limits of the world, and having erected them [the obelisks] to the highest gods in their religion. Now, the obelisk is of the hardest stone, in shape rather like a *meta*, gradually rising up to a great height, so that it portrays a sunbeam, growing ever more slender a little at a time. [The obelisk is] four-sided, leading up to a narrow summit, worked smooth by a skilled hand. Of the countless shapes, however, called hieroglyphs, which we see on it, incised everywhere, an ancient authority makes evident the antiquity of the first wisdom. Truly, they carved birds and beasts, and even many species of another world, so that the memory of things achieved might more ably survive for the future centuries of another generation; [the obelisks] gave evidence of the vows of kings, whether promised or carried out.¹³²

Like Pliny, Ammianus first introduces the obelisks through analogy. The shape he compares the obelisk to, the *meta*, was the turning post in the circus, also the place where most Roman obelisks were set, a deliberate visual play on form and context. Ammianus also demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the Egyptian symbolism, as at once reflecting and imitating the sun's light, thereby connecting earth and sky. While Ammianus has little concern for the specific Egyptian and Ptolemaic patrons, he stresses that as monuments, obelisks were kingly dedications that communicated military and other triumphs to the Egyptian people. Although his understanding of their texts is less sophisticated, he sees obelisks as monuments that are to be read: to Roman eyes the letters look like animals, birds and beasts, but nonetheless they narrate Egyptian history. Ammianus' description presumes that to understand them redisplayed in Rome, a viewer would need to know: first, the Egyptian form, as sunbeam writ in stone; second, the Egyptian function, as symbol of the power of its original king; and finally, the Egyptian significance, as an object conveying an ancient and profound Egyptian wisdom. Of these, Ammianus focuses on the last. His account goes far beyond Pliny's, quoting verbatim for his readers a translation of the text of Augustus' obelisk in the Circus Maximus from the book of an author identified by Ammianus as Hermapion.

This text-within-a-text has been the focus of much curiosity; Athanasius Kircher repudiated the passage as a whole-cloth invention,¹³³ while others hoped it would prove, like the Rosetta stone, a key to the then-undecipherable Egyptian script.¹³⁴ The translated text is now understood as relating to the Egyptian inscription on the Piazza del Popolo obelisk.¹³⁵ It is unclear when the book was written – some see Hermapion as contemporary with Augustus,¹³⁶ others with the emperor Aurelian¹³⁷ – nor are there any other references to Hermapion or his works in the literary corpus. Notably, the same Egyptian text was copied character for character onto the Roman-made obelisk from the Horti Sallustiani, today standing in front of the Trinità dei Monti above the Spanish Steps.¹³⁸ Although there is no direct link between the translation and the replication of the text on the second monument, both acts required detailed study of the Egyptian text on the Piazza del Popolo obelisk, perhaps suggesting a connection. Nonetheless, we know little of Hermapion's book beyond what Ammianus tells us: it was a translation of the Egyptian text of the obelisk, and it was available to him, in Rome, in the fourth century CE. Even the existence of Hermapion's book, however, stands as testament to the enduring Roman curiosity about the Egyptian meaning of the obelisks. To seek word-for-word accuracy in it, as one might in a modern translation, misses the larger point of the work. The act of translation here is twofold, both linguistic and cultural, translating the words of the Egyptian language while transforming their meaning into terms readers standing outside Egyptian culture could understand. What is critical about this work is that it provides

an opportunity to assess what Romans *thought* the Egyptian content might be by looking at how they tried to make sense of it in their own cultural terms.

Hermapion's translation is neither literal nor comprehensive. The text is abbreviated, the characters on the north face of the obelisk omitted altogether. The translation proceeds in a non-linear fashion, reconstructing new sense from the Egyptian phrases. It repeats itself frequently. In the translation, the obelisk speaks on behalf of the sun, opening with a form typical of Greek and Latin epistolography, "From the sun, to the King Ramestes."¹³⁹ The first line of the south side of the monument reads:

The sun, to King Ramestes. I have given to you the entire settled world, to rule over with joy, [you] whom Helios loves. – And mighty, truth-loving Apollo, the son of Heron, born from a god and the founder of the settled world, him whom the sun prefers above all others, the mighty King Ramestes [son of] Ares. To whom the entire land is made subject, with strength and courage. King Ramestes, the immortal child of the sun.¹⁴⁰

The translation stresses the king's place in both the human and divine spheres, a rendering of Egyptian divine kingship fairly accurate to the original Egyptian text.

The translation renders Re, the Egyptian sun god, as the Greek Helios (identified in Pliny's and Ammianus' discussions as the Latin Sol). Although a relatively minor figure in the Italian pantheon, Sol had been understood as divine as early as the pre-Roman period, particularly in the guise of Sol Indiges, an epithet stressing the sun's connection to the native landscape.¹⁴¹ The translation equates Ramestes with Apollo and calls him the earthly ruler of the world, the *basileus* who controls it because he conquered its foes.¹⁴² The translation renders the Egyptian tradition of divine kingship, in which the king was at once mortal and immortal, understandable to the Graeco-Roman audience by also casting the king as a *ktistes*, a word often used for the myth-hero founders of cities and peoples, similarly straddling the divine and human realms. In describing the king's mandate as presiding over the *oikoumene*, Hermapion employs a word that connotes in both Greek and Latin contexts not the whole world but its inhabited places, that is, the civilized world. The Egyptian text more literally refers to the lands and mountains of upper and lower Egypt, stressing the king's role as the ruler of the two united lands.¹⁴³ On one level, the translation captures through analogy the two different notions of what constituted the world. The *oikoumene*, up to the wild and uncontrolled antipodes as understood by Greeks and Romans, roughly equated to what the Egyptians understood as the united lands of upper and lower Egypt, inasmuch as the territory inside those boundaries represented the civilized world, Egypt itself. At the same time, in changing the word to *oikoumene*, the translation also stressed a contemporary understanding of the world and its geography, using the seemingly authentic text of the obelisk

to express a current worldview that could be as relevant to the monument's redisplay in Italy as its original display in Egypt.

Each of these texts, Pliny, Ammianus, and Hermapion, provides both an account of and a guide to the act of viewing an obelisk and its carved elements. Hermapion, for example, approximates the experience of viewing the Piazza del Popolo obelisk by organizing the translated segments by line and cardinal direction. He recreates the experience of a different culture's way of reading, following vertical lines of text up, down, and around a monument. In another sense, his text serves to enhance the obelisk's iconography. The vignettes at the obelisk's pyramidion and base show the king in the process of venerating Egyptian solar deities, Re-Harakti, Atum, and Kephri.¹⁴⁴ Considered in light of the translation, these become pictorial illustrations of the conversation between the king and the sun, of which the obelisk itself is the lasting testimony. These authors, in other words, took pains to educate their Roman readers about not just the Egyptian history of a monument, that is, where the obelisk came from, who commissioned it, and how it came to Rome, but also its art history, how it should be viewed, which visual elements mattered, and what those elements meant.

What, then, did these authors understand an Egyptian obelisk's symbolism to be? All saw obelisks as emblems of the office of kingship: the act of erecting an obelisk was proof positive of a ruler's control of his people and territory and revealed something of his nature, for good or ill. Ammianus (17.4.11) states that the word for king in hieroglyphic script was a bee, to remind rulers that power comes from strength, "a sharp sting" tempered by sweetness. Pliny relates the tale of one despotic king who tied his own son to the pinnacle of an obelisk as it was about to be erected, to ensure that the workers would take special care with the monument, fearing for their own lives should they fail and for the future safety of the dynasty.¹⁴⁵ In contrast, elsewhere Pliny casts the Ptolemies and Roman emperors who moved the monoliths as patrons of the world's finest minds and masters of cutting-edge technology.¹⁴⁶ For these authors, obelisks also represented the relationship between the commemorated monarch and the gods. Hermapion's translation presses beyond the notion that obelisks serve only as dedications made in a deity's honor to suggest that, once received by the gods, the obelisks become conduits for direct communication: Apollo speaks to the king through the form of his dedication, directly and personally, as Hermapion conveys by casting the text as a letter to an individual. For these authors, obelisks were a category of monument, symbols of Egypt's culture and its history, but they were also unique, each with its own story to tell. Because these literary sources post-date 10 BCE, we can only assume that contemporary audiences in Augustan Rome understood the obelisks similarly. (Yet, in point of fact, much of the source material used to interpret Augustan monuments is far later in date – this case is no different.) With this understanding, we turn to each, considered within

its topographical setting. The Egyptian symbolism and meaning as Romans understood it was vital to understanding their redisplay in Rome.

AUGUSTUS' OBELISKS IN ROME: CIRCUS MAXIMUS AND CAMPUS MARTIUS

Neither the Montecitorio obelisk nor the Piazza del Popolo obelisk is visible to us today as put on view by Augustus. Over time, subsequent emperors modified both the Campus Martius and the Circus Maximus significantly. And it is important to acknowledge, at least in passing, that their later appropriation abrogated the Roman contexts – just as the Roman appropriation had destroyed the Egyptian. There remains much, then, that we do not and cannot know. Other Roman obelisks, notably “Cleopatra’s Needles” and the Piazza San Pietro obelisk, were refitted and adorned in surprising ways. The former sat upon bronze weights in the form of crabs, inscribed with the names of their architect and the *praefectus aegypti* who had overseen their erection; the latter stood upon weights that took the shape of knucklebones.¹⁴⁷ If either of Augustus’ monuments were displayed (and inscribed) thus, we do not know it. Yet we are fortunate to possess significant information from literary sources, later artistic representations, and inscriptions that allows us more purchase on their Augustan display.

The Circus Maximus was one of the most important structures in the city’s social life and figured prominently in Octavian’s early plans for urban renovation, which completed his adoptive father’s intended program. [Figure 2.11] Literary sources attribute to Caesar the expansion of the Circus to the monumental dimensions it would retain through the empire. According to Pliny, Caesar’s Circus Maximus was one stadium in width and three in length; he further credits him with a seating plan able to accommodate 250,000 spectators.¹⁴⁸ Suetonius also notes how innovative were the entertainments Caesar staged there, including races in which young men of high birth participated, the “Trojan games,” and a mock battle between armies complete with cavalry and war elephants.¹⁴⁹ Following Caesar’s death, Agrippa revisited the structure as part of a campaign to curry popular favor for the triumvirs. His improvements enhanced the audience’s experience of the games, and included new dolphins, *metae*, and *ovae*, used to count the laps and keep those watching informed of the progress of the races; he also offered games and handouts of food, oil, and cloth to the people.¹⁵⁰ It is possible that Mark Antony also sponsored selective modifications to the structure at around the same time; one of his coin issues, dated to 42 BCE and featuring a radiate crown of Sol framed in a small pediment, has been interpreted as a depiction of a shrine in the Circus.¹⁵¹ [Figure 2.12] The evidence is indeterminate, however, and the coin could as easily represent the shrine to Sol on the Quirinal. Whatever the case, Dio says that the new-and-improved Circus Maximus burned nearly to

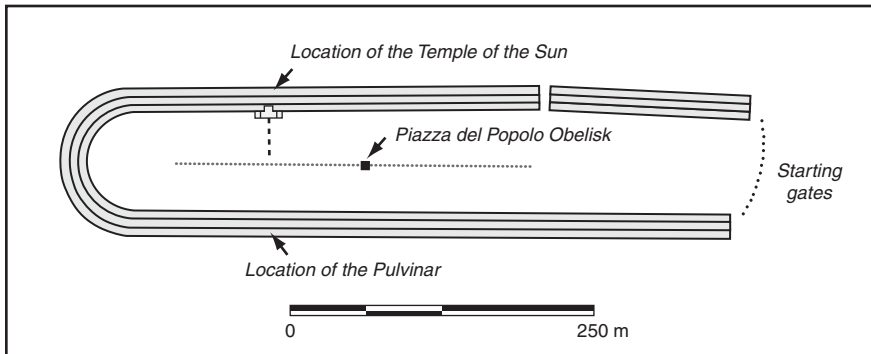


FIGURE 2.11. Plan of the Circus Maximus, showing the relative positions of the obelisk, *pulvinar*, and temple to the sun, after information from excavations, standing remains, and the Severan marble Plan (early third century CE).

Drawing credit: Karen Rasmussen, Archeographics (modified from Humphrey 1986, fig. 54).



FIGURE 2.12. Coin of Mark Antony, issued from military mint. Obverse, head of Antony; obverse legend: *M. Antoni(us) imp(erator)*. Reverse, frontal head of Sol in temple; reverse legend: *III vir r(ei) p(ublicae) c(onsituendae)* (42 BCE).

Photo credit: © Trustees of the British Museum.

the ground just a few months before the battles of Actium and Alexandria, in a fire set by freedmen angry at a heavy tax intended to finance the war. He lists the destruction among a number of ill omens, including a vicious fight between two dogs that took place in the arena just before a race was set to begin, which ended with one dog killing and devouring the other.¹⁵² Dio wrote his account, of course, long after the events described. Nevertheless, for him, the Circus Maximus appears to have taken on a particular charge under Caesar and the triumvirs. Always a locus of sanctioned competition between elites vying for popularity among the plebs, it became a symbolic stage on which the political clashes between the factions played out, presaging the eventual fall of the Republic.

After Actium and the fire, Octavian restored the Circus Maximus from the ground up and monumentalized the *pulvinar*, a small shrine where the

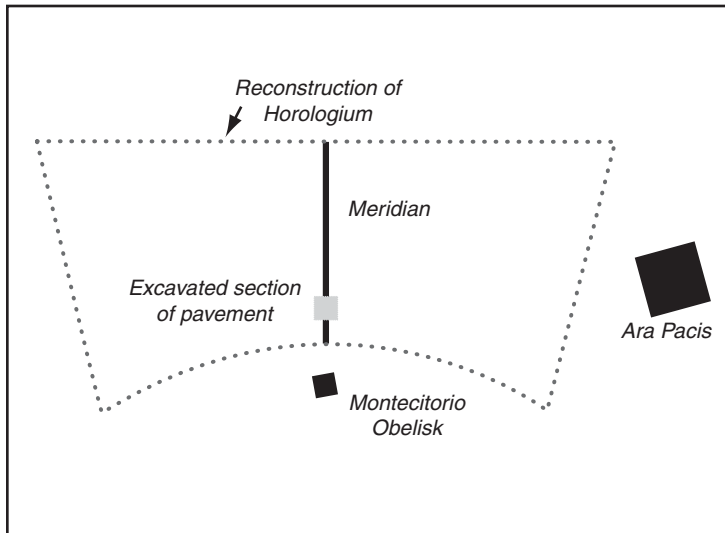


FIGURE 2.13. Plan of the Augustan Campus Martius, showing the relative positions of the obelisk, Meridian, and Ara Pacis. The dotted lines represent the now-questioned position of the “Horologium” relative to the excavated pavement.

Drawing credit: Karen Rasmussen, Archeographics (modified from Heslin 2007, Fig. 1).

public could view images of the gods and their attributes, *exuviae*, during the games.¹⁵³ Augustus himself watched the games from this shrine at times, and late in his life he was even carried to his seat in procession with the gods when failing health would otherwise have prevented his attendance.¹⁵⁴ Although we do not know what the structure looked like, it may have taken the form of a small temple or replicated the traditional wooden platform in stone, just as the Ara Pacis adopted the form of a wooden altar into marble. (Later, under Trajan, the *pulvinar* was expanded to mirror a full temple, in miniature, with pitched roof and pediment.¹⁵⁵) These constructions were among the first undertaken after Actium, probably completed by 29 BCE. When at last the obelisks were brought to Rome, Augustus stood the Piazza del Popolo obelisk on the center-line of the circus, midway between the two *metae*.

Augustus set his other monolith, the Montecitorio obelisk, in the northern Campus Martius. Its erection represented the culmination of a series of constructions already underway or recently completed: the Mausoleum, begun around 28 CE to house the ashes of members of Augustus’ family and eventually Augustus himself; the Ara Pacis, vowed in 13 BCE and completed in 9 BCE, a stone altar and precinct decorated with reliefs celebrating peace and the place of the imperial family in Rome; and the Meridian, where the obelisk, as gnomon, helped track the movement of the sun throughout the year. [Figure 2.13] Although Augustus began many of these structures, too, early in his reign, the more comprehensive plan for the site did not reach fruition

until much later. Literary evidence, in fact, suggests that the completion of the Mausoleum was not a high priority, because at the time of Marcellus' death, the first known burial in the structure, it was still incomplete.¹⁵⁶ By the time the plans were mature, Augustus no longer needed to emphasize himself as the son of Caesar, and instead his monuments stressed his own social position, building toward the future.¹⁵⁷ The Montecitorio obelisk was not the only Egyptian visual reference within the program. Two small obelisks today located on the Quirinal and at Santa Maria Maggiore stood to either side of the entrance of the Mausoleum, though they may have been added by the Flavians. Furthermore, the marble entablature of the Mausoleum included what may be atef crowns, reduced to stylized decorative ornament, and may have been modeled on Alexandrian precedents.¹⁵⁸

In the past, scholars have argued that the Montecitorio obelisk functioned as a signifier forging ideological meaning, as its shadow moved between the structures of the Augustan Campus Martius. Most famously it has been said that the shadow pointed at the Ara Pacis annually on Augustus' birthday, reminding Romans that with the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra, Rome would enjoy the everlasting benefits of peace. The matter, however, continues to incite debate.¹⁵⁹ Even the date of the small section of pavement is disputed, with some seeing it as Flavian and others as Augustan.¹⁶⁰ Most, however, now agree that the monument did not function as a clock or "Horologium", tracking the hours of the day. Rather, the Meridian functioned as a tool for tracking the length of the days throughout the year. Augustus had recently assumed the office of Pontifex Maximus, previously held by M. Lepidus, the third triumvir, until his death in exile. Under the aegis of that office, he instituted changes to the calendar, in fact reversing certain of Caesar's reforms. The Meridian helped explain and justify the changes by making empirical information about the movement of the heavens visible to all.¹⁶¹

Although set up in different locations, the Montecitorio and the Piazza del Popolo obelisks were also a pair. As Lothar Haselberger has pointed out, each would have been readily visible from afar: the flat parkland created by the draining of the Campus Martius made the Montecitorio obelisk visible from the training grounds and parklands of the Monumenta Agrippae. The reconfiguration of the Palatine Hill meant the Piazza del Popolo obelisk could be readily seen from above. The repetition of the striking vertical form drew the eye as viewers moved through the city. Both monuments, then, were critical to Augustus' urban renewal, forging visual connections across the broader cityscape.¹⁶² The apexes of both, too, were refitted with bronze ornaments, globes with spires. That of the Montecitorio obelisk can be seen, for example, on the representation of the monument on the column base of Antoninus Pius more than a century afterward. [Figure 2.14] The Piazza del Popolo obelisk, too, had a new fitting – likely also a globe, visible in later first century representations of the Circus, though it is possible that this was later

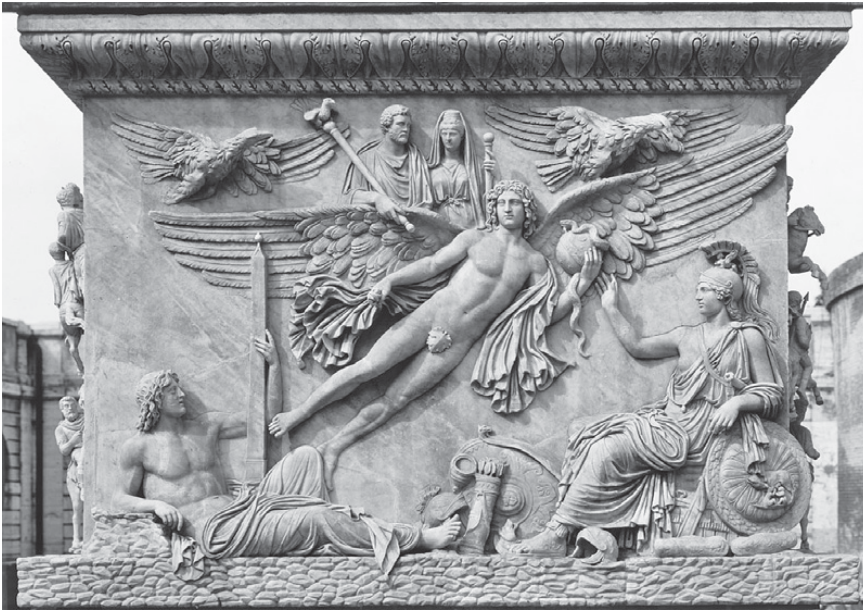


FIGURE 2.14. The base of the funerary column of Antoninus Pius, with representation of the Montecitorio obelisk, Roma, deified Antoninus Pius and Faustina, and personification of the Campus Martius (161 BCE).

Photo credit: Scala / Art Resource, NY.



FIGURE 2.15. Coin of Trajan showing the Circus Maximus from above. Obverse: portrait of Trajan; obverse legend: *Imp(eratori) Caes(ari) Nervae Traiano Aug(usto) Ger(manico) Dac(ico) P(ontifici) M(aximo) Trib(unicia) P(otestate) Co(n)s(uli) V P(atri) P(atriae)*. Reverse: the Circus Maximus and Piazza del Popolo obelisk from above; reverse legend: *s(enatus) p(opulus) q(ue) R(omanus) optimo principi* (104–11 CE).

Photo credit: © Trustees of the British Museum.

removed and the obelisk refitted with a representation of a rising flame.¹⁶³ [Figure 2.15] In addition, the identical new inscriptions on the bases joined the two through their common text. [Figure 2.16] As noted earlier, both bases read: “Caesar Augustus, imperator, son of a *divus*, *pontifex maximus*, imperator twelve times, consul eleven times, with tribunician power fourteen



FIGURE 2.16. Detail of the inscription of the Piazza del Popolo obelisk (10/9 BCE).

Photo credit: author.

times. With Egypt having been brought into the domain of the Roman people, Augustus gave this gift to the sun.”¹⁶⁴

The inscriptions describe the annexation of Egypt, employing an official idiom for the co-option of new provinces.¹⁶⁵ The Augustan calendars employ the same phrase, noting of August “in this month, Egypt was brought into the Roman empire.”¹⁶⁶ The bases, in other words, celebrated Egypt’s inclusion in the empire, offering a promise of future stability. The unusual rose granite material of the bases – never before seen – underscored Rome’s control of the natural resources of Egypt. Rolf Michael Schneider has pointed out that the word the Greeks used to describe this material was *pyrrhopoecilos*, which in Greek means “fiery-colored,” particularly appropriate for a gift to the sun.¹⁶⁷ However, though Pliny is aware of this fact, he chooses to call rose granite the *Thebaicus lapis*, translated most literally as “stone from the Thebaid.” By naming the stone after the location of its quarries, Pliny elaborates a geographical metaphor that runs throughout his narrative, in which various colored stones become emblems of the regions conquered by Rome. The name also recalls the region of southern Egypt which had rebelled after conquest,

and Pliny stresses that the source of this stone lay within the bounds of the empire: “within a part of Africa that has been assigned to (the Roman province) Aegyptus.”¹⁶⁸

Also critical to understanding the obelisks as monuments in Rome is the fact that Augustus dedicated them to Sol. The origins of the cult of Sol Indiges, the “native” or “patron” sun in Italy are obscure, though the epithet and rare literary testimonia suggest that the cult was long-standing; Varro lists Sol among those deities honored in archaic Rome.¹⁶⁹ In the last years of the Republic, Romans in Italy associated Sol with victory. As a motif on coinage, Sol peaked in popularity just after Caesar’s death. In 42 BCE, Antony minted three series with the motif for payment of his troops, one with the head of Sol housed in an *aediculum*, discussed earlier, either in the Circus or on the Quirinal; other moneyers also employed the image. The popularity of the motif certainly suggests positive associations, but it may have been a specific emblem of martial success, as Antony issued a series from the mint that accompanied his army.¹⁷⁰ Sol also occupied an important place in the religious landscape of Augustan Rome. Horace invoked Sol in the *Carmen Saeculare*, performed on the occasion of the *ludi saeculares* in 17 BCE: “Reviving Sol, you who in your gleaming chariot bring forth and hide the day, are born again and the same, may you be able to see nothing greater than the city of Rome.”¹⁷¹ The Augustan Calendars declare August 9 to be sacred to the sun, in honor of Caesar’s victory over Pompey at Pharsalus. The entry in the *Fasti Amiternini* reads: “To Sol Indiges on the Quirinal Hill. *Feriae*, because on that day C. Caesar won decisively at Pharsalus.”¹⁷² Its inclusion on the calendar may seem counterintuitive, for the memory of that battle, pitting Roman against Roman, discomfited the residents of Rome, as witnessed even long afterward by Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, an epic description of the conflict. Yet the date commemorated a military victory of critical importance to Caesar’s career and thus vital to the imperial family. Paying homage to Sol Indiges tempered the ambiguity of the victory by insisting on the preeminence of Italy’s native soil. The dedication of the two obelisks to Sol, monuments commemorating victory in civil war, stood on precedent.

* * *

In sum, the two obelisks, newly twinned, celebrated Augustus’ triumph in the wars against Antony and Cleopatra, but also projected a forward-looking image of the empire’s future as a united and cohesive entity, with Italy at its center. On this level, they were not difficult to understand, and indeed their bases employed formal language of state. Yet at the same time, even a working understanding of the “Egyptian” symbolism could enhance a viewer’s experience of the monuments in their Roman settings. For Pliny and Ammianus Marcellinus, Egyptian obelisks exemplified a king’s nature and expressed his relationship with his people and with the gods. Although Augustus did not

pretend to kingship either on Roman or Egyptian terms, both obelisks stood in locations associated with the imperial family. The renovation of the Circus was begun by Caesar and alluded to Augustus' unique relationship with his father, the *divus*. The Mausoleum in the Campus Martius glorified future generations. Both obelisks, visible from afar, manifested Augustus' patronage of Rome in the skyline of the city. Up closer, both were an extraordinary display of power in contexts long associated with elite competition. In the Circus Maximus, seated with the gods in front of his subjects, Augustus himself appeared if not divine, then close to it. As suggested in Hermapion's translation, which substituted *oikoumene* for the lands of upper and lower Egypt and so recalibrated world geography, Augustus' appropriation of these towering monuments established Rome as the epicenter of culture and civilization now and forever.

3

THE SANCTUARY OF ISIS IN POMPEII: DEDICATION AND DEVOTION, MYTH AND RITUAL

The Sanctuary of Isis in Pompeii – or, the *aedes Isidis* as it was named in an inscription that hung over the doorway – remains one of the sites in the city most frequented by visitors today, though the bare-bones structure only hints at decoration that was once vibrant. When it was excavated between 1764 and 1766, the walls stood complete to the height of the first story. A number of statues remained in situ, complete with inscriptions. A cache of imported Egyptian artifacts advertised the foreign origins of the sanctuary's patron goddess. Although the frescos were sheared from the walls and the sculptures taken away to the museum at Portici not long after its discovery, the record for this site is remarkably complete. Of its rich décor, no feature has received greater scrutiny than the frescos, especially the mythological panels from the so-called *ekklesiasterion*, notable for their quality and size and for the fact that the two extant panels together depict a single narrative, the myth of the girl Io.

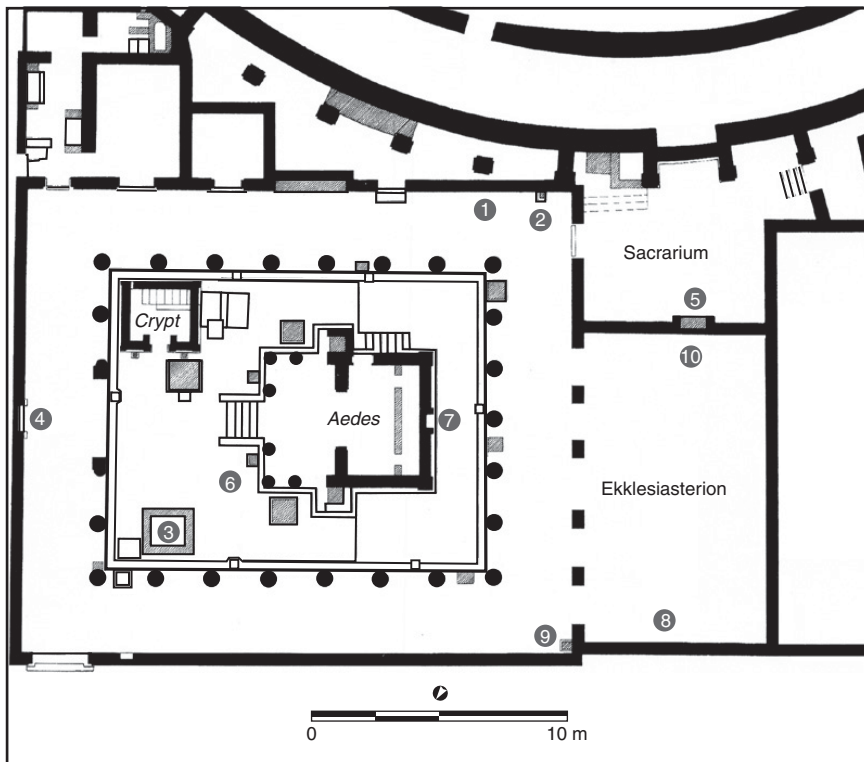
The sanctuary of Isis has not lacked academic attention; it has inspired scholarship addressing every feature of the site from its construction to its layout and design. In particular, the publication of the scattered finds, inscriptions, and frescos from the storerooms of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Naples in the 1990s, and their subsequent permanent installation in public galleries, has spurred discussion of the sanctuary's paintings and interior decoration.¹ The once prevalent notion that the sanctuary's décor reflected the bad taste of freedmen patrons has been put to bed.² A second line of inquiry has considered the interplay of the space and paintings, arguing that the designers of the sanctuary created an exotic atmosphere out of motifs and painting types that were decidedly ordinary. In the view of Eric Moormann, the sanctuary had “an Egyptian and a Roman face,” similar to the double-style of Alexandrian tombs.³ The style was no wholesale Egyptian import, and parallels for many of the motifs from the sanctuary can be found in private homes and public monuments throughout the city. Yet these observations, while

accurate, also sound a clarion call: if the sanctuary's décor appears designed to have been accessible to many viewers, then we must investigate it as widely resonant. Whatever their religious beliefs, followers of Isis were members of the broader community, fully versed in its customs and traditions.

Who were the Isiaci of Pompeii? How did the paintings, sculptures, and ornaments shape their day-to-day and ritual experiences of their sanctuary? Did their use of the space change over time? Throughout this chapter, I bring the full evidentiary record to bear upon these questions, including not only small finds, marble sculptures, and grand paintings, but also hand-written graffiti and professionally carved marble inscriptions. Traditionally, the epigraphic material from this site has been used for purposes of prosopography, to determine the cult members' social status and family connections. The dedicatory inscriptions do far more than provide documentation of the name and rank of individuals, however. These inscriptions are the tangible remains of their patrons' negotiations with the divine, and also serve as reflections of their dedicators' public image. Careful attention shows that cult members first and foremost situated their gifts – which ranged in size and scale from the monumental (the construction of the *aedes*) to the minor (the dedication of a single statue) – within commemorative practices common to those living in Pompeii and employed the standard formulae of public munificence. These gifts were intended to “speak” to not only an initiated audience but also to the broader community. This awareness allows us to consider the impact of the sanctuary's artworks in a new light. Indeed, even the lavish frescos depicting Io were a gift, given to the community by a woman named Corelia Celsa. In this rare instance, it is possible to address issues of viewership, reception, and response, with an awareness of the ancient audience as individuals.

DECORATION AND FUNCTION OF THE SANCTUARY OF ISIS

The sanctuary of Isis in Pompeii is remarkable not just for its preservation by the eruption of Vesuvius, but because it is also possible to reconstruct its history. It may even have been one of the first sanctuaries to the Egyptian gods in Italy.⁴ The sanctuary stood in the heart of an old and busy neighborhood in Pompeii, near the Porta Stabiana, the public theaters, and the so-called Forum Triangulare.⁵ That it shares a party wall with the Large Theater provides a terminus post quem of the second century BCE, though not a fixed date for its initial construction. Some scholars believe that an existing Republican-period structure was expanded in the early first century CE, annexing space from the nearby Samnite Palestra; others believe that the construction belongs entirely to the Augustan era.⁶ No epigraphic material from the site predates the Augustan period, leaving the matter open to debate. What is clear, however, is that there was an important phase of construction in the early first



1. Norbanus Sorex
2. Venus
3. Ritual deposit
4. Shrine of Harpocrates
5. Niche shrine
6. Hieroglyphic inscription
7. Bacchus
8. Painting of Io, Argus, and Mercury
9. Isis
10. Painting of Io and Isis

FIGURE 3.1. Plan of the sanctuary of Isis in 79 CE, with the locations of major finds marked. Drawing credit: Karen Rasmussen, Archeographics (modified from de Caro 1992, Tav. 1).

century and that at this time the community of Pompeii welcomed the cult openly. The earthquake of 62 CE that damaged so much of the city also left the sanctuary in ruins, necessitating its reconstruction. The plan as we have it today reflects this final phase, as it was used in 79 CE. [Figure 3.1]

The sanctuary took the form of an open-air courtyard and covered portico. It was accessed through a small doorway on the Via del Tempio di Iside, similar in form to that of the Temple of Apollo in the Forum – providing entry while protecting the interior from street traffic, and possibly also serving to close the sanctuary at times to all but the cult’s initiates. A broad intercolumniation on the east walk of the portico provided a striking frontal vista of the *aedes* itself, a free-standing structure of largely traditional form, with four columns across the front, a high podium, deep porch, and truncated



FIGURE 3.2. Frontal view of the *aedes Isidis*.

Photo credit: Gianni Dagli Orti / The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY.

cella. [Figure 3.2] The opened intercolumniation between the two center piers accessing the room beyond, the *ekklesiasterion*,⁷ lent a pleasing uniformity to the plan and offered glimpses of the room's large-scale paintings. Additional suites of small rooms served a range of functions, including food preparation, storage, and perhaps accommodation for any personnel in residence. Throughout, the paintings were fashionable "Fourth style" compositions, including vignettes of priests and priestesses, still-lives, *naumachiae*, pygmy landscapes, and an acanthus-frieze. Great care was taken in coordinating the layout of the space with its painted decoration, executed by workshops known from their work in the city's wealthy houses.⁸

The courtyard and portico were the ritual and social heart of the sanctuary. The *aedes* would likely have housed the cult statue (never found) and also served as a stage for devotion and public ritual. A set of stairs, tucked into the back of the structure, allowed the officiants to ascend unseen by congregants situated to the front of the structure or served some other ritual purpose. A number of free-standing structures clustered around the temple, including statue bases, altars, and the so-called Nilometer or crypt that perhaps provided "Nile water" to be used in ceremonies.⁹ In the portico, the excavators found ritual deposits interred beneath the floor level.¹⁰ The decoration of the portico also alluded to ritual celebrations, with representations of venerants making offerings, reading ritual texts, and in one case taking the guise of the



FIGURE 3.3. Head of Isis found in the fill of the ekklesiasterion (mid-first century to 79 CE).
Photo credit: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

god Anubis. On the east wall of the portico, facing the temple of Isis, there was a small shrine to Harpocrates.

Of particular importance to the present discussion are the rooms known as the ekklesiasterion and the sacrarium. The ekklesiasterion opened directly off the portico to the west, separated by a series of arches. The décor of the room was opulent, with large-scale sacro-idyllic landscape scenes flanking mythological panel paintings. The room's contents included a sistrum, a male skeleton, a table, a bronze latch with a keyhole, a two-foot tall terracotta vase, a bronze cooking pot, and luxury tableware (four vessels made of glass and a drinking cup "worked with pearls"). The workmen found fragments of an acrolith of Isis, too, in the fill above floor-level, likely fallen from the roof.¹¹ [Figure 3.3] The many finds associated with cooking and eating suggest that this multipurpose space was suited to ritual dining; it may also have been used for meetings, both by initiates and members of the community at large.

To the south and southwest of the portico lay the sacrarium, a suite of rooms that functioned as both storeroom and shrine. Though modest, the sacrarium was vital to the day-to-day operation of the cult and likely served as a focal point for personal devotion. Its contents included portrait heads and other sculptural fragments, an iron tripod, a glass carafe, more than fifty



FIGURE 3.4. Animal paintings from the sacrum, including baboon, wild dog, and vulture (c. 62–79 CE).

Photo credit: © Vanni Archive / Art Resource, NY.

lamps, a “bronze sacrificial knife,” an Egyptian figurine (or perhaps two), and many other terracotta or bronze vessels and utensils.¹² The room included a niche-shrine, a scene of Isis-on-the-Nile, and depictions of a number of Egyptian animals and deities, including Serapis and Apis, rendered in a style similar to paintings from domestic shrines.¹³ [Figures 3.4, 3.5, Plate IV]

The shrine paintings deserve particular attention because they express the myth of Isis as understood by the Pompeian Isiaki. The scene of Isis-on-the-Nile appears to illustrate a critical moment in the story in which the goddess tends the remains of her murdered husband, Osiris. Plutarch’s *de Iside et Osiride* offers the most complete literary exposition of this myth. In certain respects, this account accords well with the painted scene, though Plutarch must always be read with the caveat that his discussions of Egyptian theology served his literary agenda – namely, to support arguments about the relative antiquity of Greek and Egyptian culture. He provides a valuable window into those stories about Isis in circulation in the Roman period, but does not necessarily offer an accurate description of cult practice or belief.¹⁴ Plutarch’s story of Isis begins with a conflict over the regency of Egypt, of which Osiris was king and his sister Isis queen. The siblings had one legitimate son, Horus, conceived while the two were twins in the womb. Planning to depose Osiris, their brother Typhon commissioned a beautiful box and promised to give it to anyone whose body fit perfectly within. When Osiris tried the box out, Typhon sealed the lid and killed him. He chopped the body into fourteen pieces and scattered them throughout Egypt. Isis found them all, save the penis, which she replaced with a magical simulacrum. She then gave the body a proper burial, in some way also bringing Osiris back to life. Osiris and



FIGURE 3.5. Painting from the sacrum, seated Serapis (c. 62–79 CE).

Photo credit: © Vanni Archive / Art Resource, NY.

Isis then conceived a second child, Harpocrates.¹⁵ The shrine painting, when read with Plutarch, appears to frame the moment just before the miracle of Osiris' resurrection by Isis. The river is the Nile; the box is the casket of Osiris; the falcon alludes to Horus or perhaps foreshadows the birth of Harpocrates. The visual myth in the sacrum thus establishes Isis as a goddess with power over life and death, both in her ability to revive Osiris and to bear children in otherwise impossible conditions, whether herself unborn or after Osiris' death. These are the mysteries of Isis as understood by her Pompeian worshippers.

That the myth of Isis is given clearest expression only in the sacrum, the most modestly decorated room in the sanctuary, should not surprise. Our best textual source for the rituals of the cult of Isis in the Roman world comes from Apuleius' fictionalized initiation in the *Metamorphoses*, instructive for how cults advertised the existence of their secrets while also protecting them. Apuleius' narrator, Lucius, describes his initiation as a multi-day affair, involving considerable expense for gifts, feasts, and ritual costumes. The priest announces these requirements by reading from a sacred book filled with cryptic script only he can read, the better to protect the content from, as Lucius puts it, "the curiosity of the *profani*." He draws a sharp line

between those with and without cultic knowledge, referring to initiates at different times as devotees, *initiati* or *sacrati*, and *renati*, “those who have been reborn.”¹⁶ Lucius is deliberately cagey about his initiation, but does say that the ritual took place in the *penetralia*, rooms deep in the heart of the sanctuary where only initiates may enter.¹⁷ It is tempting to read the sacrarium in the sanctuary of Isis in Pompeii, both because of its position and its paintings, as similar to Apuleius’ *penetralia*.¹⁸ Even if the sacrarium was not a space in which religious instruction took place, the shrine paintings nevertheless reveal a sophisticated ability on the part of the initiates to recognize and read Egyptian symbols. We can use this manifest ritual knowledge to inform our understanding of the “initiate’s eye view” of artworks on display in more public areas of the sanctuary, too.

In sum, the sanctuary of Isis in Pompeii is a unique context – perhaps better preserved and recorded than any other cult site in Roman Italy. For this reason, if no other, it well deserves the scholarly and popular attention it has received. Despite the sanctuary’s ritual function and visual affinity with domestic decoration, it was also a semi-public space designed for private devotion and communal enjoyment, subject to a different model of patronage than private homes, which are dominated in the main by a single interest. It is vital to explore the dialectic between space and décor in a way that acknowledges a multiplicity of readings, to treat each feature as intended to be viewed by and legible to those with and without specialized knowledge of ritual.

CULT AND COMMUNITY: THE ISIACI

A wealth of epigraphic testimonia documents the followers of Isis in Pompeii, who called themselves the Isiaci. Eight marble inscriptions, one mosaic inscription, and one ceramic vessel inscribed with a graffito attest to gifts made in the sanctuary; two programmata from nearby streets urge the election of candidates the Isiaci sponsored for public office. This information has been vital for the reconstruction of the constituency of the cult. Together, the inscriptions and graffito evidence a number of residents of the city who self-identified as initiates, or whose membership can be assumed based on the fact that they made dedications within the sanctuary: N. Popidius Celsinus, N. Popidius Ampliatus, Corelia Celsa, Manilia Chrysa, M. Faecius Suavis, M. Faecius Primogenes, C. Norbanus Sorex, L. Caecilius Phoebus, Popidius Naeltis, and Popidius Natalis.¹⁹ Most appear to have been active in the cult in the period from before the earthquake until the eruption, 62 to 79 CE. As a group, the cult’s membership included both freeborn and freedmen of all ages. Some had ties to prominent local families; others are unattested in the city’s epigraphic record. All, however, are visible to us *because* they were wealthy and influential enough to have paid for costly dedications. These

individuals represent only a fraction of the cult's membership, but an important and informative one. [Appendix 3.1 for text and translations]

The best-known inscription was found broken in fragments near the primary entrance and has been restored to a place above the threshold. It advertised the sanctuary's reconstruction after the earthquake to all passersby: "Numerius Popidius Celsinus, the son of Numerius, rebuilt the *aedes Isidis* from its foundations, after it collapsed in the earthquake. Because of his generosity, the town council elected him into their order for free, although he was only six (years old)."²⁰ The inscription, according to the general understanding, implies that the child's father financed the reconstruction; Numerius Popidius Ampliatus was a freedman associated with an influential local family who, because of his former servitude, would have been unable to hold public office himself.²¹ He also dedicated a statue of Bacchus, placed prominently in a niche in the back of the temple, with an inscription stating that it was paid for with his own money, thereby presenting him as a man of means.²² [Figure 3.6] Although rare, there are other examples of children gaining seats on the town councils of Pompeii and other Italian towns. Often these cases involved children of higher status than their parents. A close epigraphic parallel from Amiternum, for example, testifies to the town council enrolling a three-year old child in the council whose mother appears to have been a freedwoman.²³

The nomenclature of Numerius Popidius Celsinus is unusual, further suggesting a disparity in his parents' rank. The filiation ("son of Numerius") proves he was *ingenuus*, or freeborn, yet his full name combines his parents' names, Numerius Popidius Ampliatus and Corelia Celsa. The child's praenomen and nomen are derived from his father's name, but the cognomen Celsinus is a descriptive version of his mother's. This may suggest that Corelia Celsa's status was greater than her husband's and that she was freeborn. She may also have been related to a prominent Pompeian family documented in electoral programmata dating to the last years of the city.²⁴ Numerius Popidius Ampliatus' inclusion in one other fragmentary inscription from Pompeii, a list of ministers in the city similar to the *Augustales* or the *ministri Augusti*, confirms his status as an active and wealthy member of the local community.²⁵ On the whole, then, the long-held picture of the family's place in the cult is compelling: the case speaks to social mobility within Pompeii, making clear that through their generosity the parents improved their son's status (and, thus, that of future generations) while also increasing each individual's social capital within and outside of the cult. The inscription is a public record, writing the patronage of this single family into stone, a classic case of civic euergetism. Yet, at the same time, the Numerii Popidii claim credit for rebuilding only one part of the sanctuary, the temple proper. In large part because of the unusual information contained therein, this renowned example has cast a shadow over the rest of the sanctuary's extensive epigraphic record. To best



FIGURE 3.6. Statue of Bacchus from the sanctuary of Isis in Pompeii, dedicated by Numerius Popidius Ampliatus (mid-first century to 79 CE).

Photo credit: Führmann, Neg. D-DAI-Rom 39.999.

understand the broader system of patronage at work in the sanctuary as a whole, we must look further.

Another inscription, largely overlooked by scholars, documented the gift of a *schola*: “Marcus Faecius Suavis and Marcus Faecius Primogenes [gave] the *schola*, from their own money.” This inscription, also of white marble, was found in two fragments, one on the street side of the temple precinct and the other apparently inside the building.²⁶ Although the dedicatory inscription of the Numerii Popidii may have taken pride of place above the doorway, the findspot is suggestive. It is possible that the Faecii, too, commemorated their gift by placing their inscription on the exterior wall.

The brothers appear to have been freedmen, and one of them may also have served on the *ministri Augusti* along with Numerius Popidius Ampliatus – confirming that this individual also sought out civic honors suitable to his status.²⁷ The design of the inscription, which gave the names of the two dedicators

in large letters, was intended to attract the eye. That this inscription invites public recognition is plain from the stress on the source of the funds. Less apparent is what the gift was. Although *scholae* were often semi-circular seating structures (as in the popular Pompeian tomb form) neither the shape nor the function was a requirement. The word was a generic term for architectural space, designating a part or subsection of a monument. *Scholae* often appear to have been multipurpose spaces that could serve as offices or meeting halls for collegia or other groups.²⁸ The inscription may refer to the refurbished portico or one of the many rooms clustered around it. Although we cannot be precise as to the space dedicated, we must consider that constructing a *schola* represented a considerable expense, and that *scholae* in temple contexts often served the public at large.

Sculptural dedications from the sanctuary also show that many cult members had expectations that their gifts would be viewed, recognized, and appreciated by all visiting the sanctuary. Two inscriptions make reference to legislation undertaken by the local town council, stating that the position of each sculpture (the Isis of Lucius Caecilius Phoebus [Figure 1.22] and the portrait herm of Norbanus Sorex) was granted by decurial decree: *locus datus decreto decurionum*, “the spot given by decree of the town council.” This formula, employed often in Pompeii, singled out an individual for recognition for good works done for the community, providing as here a choice location for the display of a sculpture, a prime seat in the theater or amphitheater, or even a public plot of land on which to construct a tomb. At times, the formula acts as acknowledgment that public works were financed by private monies, part of the formal language of public benefaction and gratitude. Often, however, it indicates that the space in question was one over which the community had control, that the place itself was public property.²⁹ The sculptures and their inscriptions were paid for by the individuals setting them up in the god’s honor. As a group, the Isiaci were united, first and foremost, by religious affiliation. Yet the language in their dedications shows awareness of, and respect for, the magistrates.

The dedicatory inscriptions are indispensable, therefore, not merely for reconstructing the constituency of the cult, but also for illustrating its integration into the broader community. It is important to recognize, however, that there is also important information they do not convey. They do not illuminate the internal organization or hierarchy of the cult, nor do they make reference to the priestly positions held by initiates. The sole exception may be the dedication of Numerius Popidius Ampliatus, which describes him as *pater*.³⁰ Although most often read as describing the father relative to his son, *pater* could indicate status at the head of a cultic hierarchy in some settings.³¹ The electoral programmata, too, may suggest some manner of internal organization. [Appendix 3.2] Two surviving dipinti attest political endorsements of the Isiaci.³² The first was located across the

street from the temple, and sponsored by Popidius Natalis, on behalf of his patron as aedile: “Popidius Natalis, the client – along with the Isiaci – asks for Cuspius Pansa for aedile.”³³ Though clearly paid for by the individual, this notice suggests that at least some portion of the temple’s members also endorsed Cuspius Pansa, a popular candidate in the city. A second dipinto located on the same *insula*, however, endorsed another candidate for aedile in what was likely the same race: “All the Isiaci (*isiaci universi*) sponsor Cn. Helvius Sabinus.” It is tempting to read this as a direct response indicating that Popidius Natalis spoke out of turn, though it remains possible that these notices date to different years.³⁴ Even so, the use of *universus* to describe the consensus of the group in the second notice is significant. The adjective appears with some frequency in the electoral notices of Pompeii’s professional associations, including the fullers (*fullones*), the fruit-sellers (*pomarii*), the wood-workers (*lignarii*), the goldsmiths (*aurifeces*), the mule-drivers (*muliones*), and, jokingly, all the sleepers in the city (*dormientes*).³⁵ Colloquially, it emphasizes the consensus of the members of a group, and it seems to have had force. In the case of the *fullones*, the entire group endorsed Cuspius Pansa, but in their other notices, endorsing Julius Polybius as a *duovir*, they do not express unanimity.³⁶ The same holds true for the *pomarii*, an active group judged by the number of their endorsements.³⁷ The broader implication of these professionally painted advertisements is that they were a means by which the cult could act as a unit, suggesting a formal organizational structure and hierarchy, distinct from whatever positions of prestige or power the members or their families might have held in the wider community.

Taken together, the marble inscriptions from the sanctuary of Isis and the painted electoral programmata from the streets nearby show that the members of the cult were not a monolithic group of freedmen hoping to combine their meager influence to become a stronger political force, but rather a collection of individuals and families, some of whom already occupied and some of whom aspired to positions of established social prominence.³⁸ Traditionally, the inscriptions and programmata have been used to catalogue the cult’s members and to understand their social positions through investigation of nomenclature, magistracies, and familial relationships. From the perspective of the users of and visitors to the sanctuary, however, these inscriptions were ancillary to the gifts they documented, whether of space, sculpture, or painting. Much of the epigraphic material from the temple is only preserved today as a result of direct intervention by individuals associated with the cult’s reconstruction after the earthquake. Considering the inscriptional evidence as reflecting deliberate choices and votive acts of the Isiaci brings us closer to understanding the ways in which initiates might have experienced, or “seen,” the space of the sanctuary.

DISPLAY AND REDISPLAY, DEDICATION AND DEVOTION

Despite the claim that the sanctuary was rebuilt from its very foundations after it had been damaged in the earthquake, in fact a wide range of materials from the site were reused, including dedications, building materials, and the cult's collection of Egyptian antiquities. Almost all of the sculptural dedications from the precinct, for example, belonged to the pre-earthquake phase of construction, as evidenced by the fact that many bear the signs of repair and modification.³⁹ Other dedicated materials were kept but had not yet been returned to public view at the time of the eruption. These consistent patterns of reuse were in part a matter of expediency, making good use of rare, precious, or otherwise expensive materials. Yet they also show how the Isiaci managed the sanctuary's resources and reveal their awareness of its recent history.

The niche shrine in the sacrarium, for example, was refaced with an inscribed marble plaque that proclaimed "Marcus Lucretius bequeathed it," engraved on cipollino marble.⁴⁰ This was an instance of expedient reuse, repurposing a costly building material to serve a new function. Nevertheless, it is revealing about the cult's relationship with the community both in the early imperial "past" and in the post-earthquake "present." The man in question, Marcus Lucretius Decidianus Rufus, lived during the Augustan period and was a leading light of his day, the recipient of no fewer than three honorific portraits, including one in the Forum. An inscribed base for an honorific statue was also found in close proximity to the sanctuary of Isis, perhaps within or just outside the sacred precinct. In the view of Fabrizio Pesando, it was from the so-called Samnite Palestra just adjacent to the temple, though the editors of the CIL include it with the assemblage from the sanctuary.⁴¹ Although the evidence is insufficient to say whether Marcus Lucretius Decidianus Rufus was a member of the cult of Isis, he seems to have designated the area of the city in which the sanctuary was located as a recipient of funds from his will. Five other herms and plaques throughout the city attest to similar bequests. In addition to the example from the Temple of Isis, there was a plaque in the Chalcidicum and Porticus off the Forum, another in the Doric portico of the Forum Triangulare, two more in the ramp that joined the large theater to the Strada Stabiana, and one found on a street outside the city walls.⁴² As a group, these form a curious assemblage. Although in each case the associated monument was constructed with private funds, by and large *other* prominent members of the Augustan community sponsored the monuments. Eumachia, a public priestess, funded the Chalcidicum; M. Holconius Rufus and M. Holconius Celer donated money to renovate the Large Theater; L. Sepunius Sandilianus and M. Herennius Epidianus paid for specific monuments in the Forum Triangulare.⁴³

It is possible that M. Lucretius Decidianus Rufus deeded money to the community – that is, to the *colonia* of Pompeii – to use as it saw fit, but far more likely that he designated these monuments in his testament. Posthumous bequests to communities or towns were rare, particularly early in the first century CE. More often, the donor designated legacies in advance, specifically planning them so as to best perpetuate his memory after death.⁴⁴ Although these structures did not name him as the primary donor, M. Lucretius Decidianus Rufus' sponsorship nonetheless makes sense as part of a wide-ranging urban renewal of Pompeii in the early empire. All of the projects provided for in the will drew inspiration, in one way or another, from contemporary projects in the capital city of Rome. Eumachia, for example, dedicated her porticus to "Augustan Concord and Piety," a theme echoed in its decoration, which paired statues of Rome's mythological founders with formal *elogia* praising their deeds.⁴⁵ The Forum Triangulare and Samnite Palestra may have been inspired by the Augustan renovation of the Campus Martius, including Agrippa's new Saepta. Its renovations included a *schola* and *horologium*, consistent with the view that it acted as a public park or ornamental ruin; and the theater nearby drew inspiration from the Augustan theater of Marcellus.⁴⁶ Although M. Lucretius Decidianus Rufus' sponsorship of these structures did not eclipse the munificence of their primary dedicators, in all of the locations the funds were acknowledged openly with the commemorative plaques. The community erected a statue in his honor after his death in recognition of his career and perhaps of these gifts.⁴⁷ The evidence for these bequests shows that the sanctuary of Isis and other structures nearby fit into a broad pattern of urbanization that modeled the city of Pompeii on the capital in Rome. Though Octavian famously expelled the cults from the part of the city within Rome's *pomerium*, he allowed, and in some cases financed, the refurbishment of shrines to Isis in other parts of the city.⁴⁸ In this period, the sanctuary in Pompeii, too, occupied a part of the city undergoing reconstruction and revitalization.

After the earthquake, one of Marcus Lucretius Decidianus Rufus' descendants, Marcus Decidius Pilonius Rufus, systematically restored his honorific portraits, including the two from the Forum and the one near the Temple of Isis: "M. Lucretius Decidianus Rufus, three-times a *duo-vir quinquenalis*, a *pontifex*, a *tribunus militum*, and a *praefectus fabrum*. M. Decidius Pilonius Rufus replaced it."⁴⁹ James Franklin has suggested this was a strategy to keep the family name prominent in the local scene and to tie them to the Lucretii; this connection was predicated on a distant familial relationship, for the Lucretii had long ago adopted M. Lucretius Decidianus Rufus.⁵⁰ While the reuse of the plaque in the sacrarium in the sanctuary's later phase does not seem to have been similarly ideologically motivated, this example illustrates the power of the past *in* the present: places, families, and monuments lived long in the historical memory

of the community. Acts of reuse reminded viewers of the sanctuary's history, even as they improved on and changed the design of its internal spaces.

The bronze herm of Gaius Norbanus Sorex, found in the southwest corner of the portico, is another instance of deliberate re-display. This portrait is difficult to date because Norbanus was a freedman and held no datable magistracies. The style of the work supports a date from the late first century BCE to the mid-first century CE.⁵¹ Yet the language of the inscription argues for a date earlier, rather than later, in this range: “the *magistri* of the suburban district of Augustus Felix [placed this statue] of C. Norbanus Sorex, [player] of second parts; the place was given by decree of the *decurio*.”⁵² The *magistri* were freedmen and slaves responsible for a district outside the city's bounds; the first evidence for their activity in Pompeii can be dated to 7 BCE. They also erected an identical portrait of Norbanus in the Chalcidicum and Porticus of Eumachia, also known to have been constructed in the early empire, as discussed above. Norbanus Sorex is also attested in the sanctuary of Diana Nemorensis by a dedicatory inscription associated with materials belonging to the early first century CE.⁵³ There are two potential (and possibly complementary) explanations of the decision to replace this dedication: first, because Norbanus Sorex was an eminent member of the community, possibly a high-ranking official within the cult's hierarchy, and, second, because his portrait made an impressive visual impact. It was notable foremost for its prestigious material, one of only a few bronze portraits known from Pompeii.⁵⁴

The sanctuary kept portraits of and dedications given by other members, too, though they lack inscriptions and cannot be connected to known individuals. As noted earlier, the eclectic contents of the sacrarium included lamps, bronze utensils, and the “Egyptian idol”; it also contained a number of fragments of sculptures, including two portraits of women (extant) and one of a man (now lost) along with hands, feet, and bronze ligatures for repairing statues or holding them together. That the female portraits were once dedications or honorific portraits is clear from the mode of representation: the hairstyles mimic popular early imperial styles in a more cultic mode, with a prominent knot at the rear that recalls the “knot of Hercules.” [Figure 3.7] They recall funerary monuments that depict followers of Isis in ritual guise. Women often depicted themselves in the habit of the goddess with fringed palla and wore a version of her hairstyle and headdress.⁵⁵ The portraits from the sacrarium remind us that the dedicatory inscriptions are not representative of the cult's constituency; there were more women in the Pompeian cult than this evidence taken alone would suggest. (The inscriptions attest only two: Manilia Chrysa, of unknown date,⁵⁶ and Corelia Celsa.) The redisplay of these portraits was not, it seems, a priority. Nevertheless, the fact that they were kept within the sacred precinct argues that older dedications were inherently valuable to the Isiaci.



FIGURE 3.7a, b. Female portrait from the cache in the sacrum (before 62 CE), front and rear views.

Photo credit: Führmann, Neg. D-DAI-Rom 39.914, 39.917.

There were many different ways that gifts – whether of sculpture, money, furniture, or other portable goods – could be given to deities, and for many different reasons. The language of the dedications from the sanctuary of Isis suggests that few of the inscribed dedications were formally consecrated or transferred into the *res sacrae* of the cult. Only one inscription describes the gift in a way that makes clear that it was a votive. The altar given by Manilia Chrysa was inscribed *votum solvit*, “resolved the vow,” which along with the phrase *ex visu* appears sporadically in Pompeian inscriptions to indicate a gift made in honor of a specific vow, event, or divine vision.⁵⁷ Most of the inscriptions from the sanctuary either do not make clear the nature of the dedication or say that it was placed (*posuit*) rather than made sacred (e.g., *dedit, dedicavit*).⁵⁸ This language may reflect the fact that the sanctuary was built at private, rather than public expense.⁵⁹ Yet whatever their legal status, as gifts to the gods dedications did far more than express an individual’s social status or serve as acts of public munificence. They also expressed an intimate relationship between the donor and the deity, lasting long beyond the initial act of gift-giving. Commissioning a statue was often not the end of a patron’s interaction with the work. Sculptures required maintenance: Romans waxed

marble statues to improve their appearance, and touching, dressing, or other acts of caretaking brought worshippers into communion with deities.⁶⁰ In this way, materials given by individuals could come to symbolize an entire community's relationship with the gods as well. And, as dedications accrued within a temple or sanctuary, they also became a source of wealth and potential income. The temple regulations of the Jupiter Liber at Furfo, for instance, stipulate that those in charge of the sacred space were permitted to alter, lease, or even sell any gifts given to the god (including animal hides left over from sacrifices), provided that the profits were returned to improve or beautify the sanctuary.⁶¹ That so much material from the sanctuary of Isis in Pompeii was reused – including the sculptural dedications returned to public view, and the cache of lamps, sacrificial paraphernalia, and anonymous portraits warehoused in the *sacrarium* – reveals the cultic community in action as a group, at once investing in the sanctuary's future and mindful of its history. And, by keeping their own gifts in good repair, individuals renewed personal relationships with the goddess and kept their names in the public eye.

It is only with the recognition that dedicators used their gifts equally to showcase their community identities and express personal acts of piety that we may consider them as visual displays. All three extant sculptural dedications, the Isis of L. Caecilius Phoebus, the Bacchus of Numerius Popidius Ampliatus, and the Venus of an unknown dedicator, had broad-based appeal. As discussed in [Chapter 1](#), the Isis likely came from a prestigious workshop in the area, and draws heavily on visual vocabularies that were not Egyptian, whether as a matter of taste, a method to legitimize the deity, or both. The other two dedications were versions of known sculpture types. The Venus statue belongs to the Aphrodite Anadyomene type popular throughout the ancient world and widely adaptable.⁶² [\[Figure 3.8\]](#) It was common in Pompeii, where Venus held a special position as the patron goddess of the town, known both as Venus Pompeiana and Venus Fisica Pompeiana. She was venerated in a sanctuary with origins predating the Sullan colony.⁶³ Isis, too, was sometimes represented as Anadyomene, and statuettes of an Isis and Venus Anadyomene were found together in a domestic shrine in Scafati.⁶⁴ As a dedication in the sanctuary, then, the statue type did double duty. It openly honored traditions common to all Pompeians, but also spoke to the select audience of the Isiaci of deeper connections between Venus and Isis.

The Bacchus dedicated by Numerius Popidius Ampliatus was also a common figure type. Bacchus stands in relaxed contrapposto, wearing high-laced sandals and an animal hide, with an ivy crown. His proper left arm is raised, and though the hand is damaged, it may have held a *kantharos*. A panther sits near his feet. Like Venus, Bacchus was a staple of the local pantheon. There was a small temple to him in the countryside nearby, in use from the Oscan period to the last days of the city. He appears often in private shrines, perhaps because of his connection to viticulture, central to

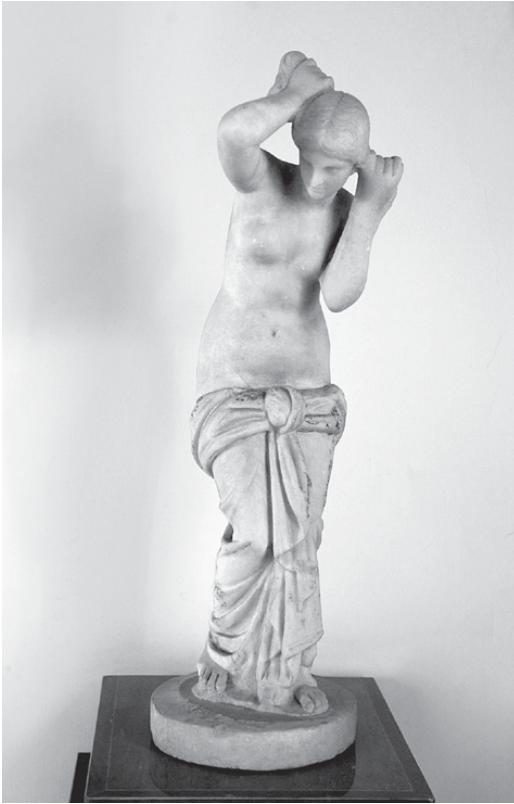


FIGURE 3.8. Statue of Venus Anadyomene from the sanctuary of Isis in Pompeii (mid-first century to 79 CE).

Photo credit: © Vanni Archive / Art Resource, NY.

the economy of the region, a connection best expressed in the well-known painting from the House of the Centenary where the god is represented as a cluster of grapes. Here, too, he shares wine with the panther at his side.⁶⁵ As with Venus, Bacchus had different, although related, associations for those with more intimate knowledge of the cult's mythologies. The representation of Bacchus might have been doubly resonant because it may have drawn on connections between Bacchus and Osiris.⁶⁶ This association is well attested in literary sources of both the Greek and Roman periods, yet the affinity described in literature is not evident in representations of Osiris, which are rare in Roman contexts.⁶⁷ In other words, as with the Venus statue, the figure of Bacchus could be read "plain" as depicting a locally prominent deity without triggering any association with the Egyptian cult. For viewers with cultic knowledge, however, the Isiac associations could have been evident and powerful.

All three sculptures were brightly colored when found. Painting and gilding the sculptures also offered the dedicators a chance to tweak the broader

types in ways that better suited the setting. So, for example, the excavators report that the Venus had yellow hair and was heavily painted, though today color is only visible in traces of blue in the drapery around her hips. The breasts and the “upper part of her stomach” were also covered with applied gold leaf, emphasizing the reproductive body.⁶⁸ Similarly, the excavators noted that there was significant pigment and gilding on the statue of Bacchus. His hair was both painted and highlighted with gold leaf, as were the eyes and eyebrows. New details were also added using gilding, including armbands, bracelets, and a golden necklace.⁶⁹ Recent work on polychromy of sculpture in antiquity suggests that artworks were painted and re-painted numerous times during their long lives, a critical component of keeping the works in good repair.⁷⁰ The Bacchus, in fact, had been repaired at least once in antiquity, for it was discovered with bronze ligaments used to reinforce breaks in the marble. This suggests that this dedication – and, likely many of the others – had long been on display. The applications of paint and gold leaf to all of the statues likely post-dated the earthquake, part of the process of repair necessary for returning the works to public view. Here, too, we may again recognize the active role of the patrons or other cult members in keeping gifts to Isis in good order over long periods of time.

Let us step back for a moment to consider what a close inspection of all the dedications from the sanctuary of Isis can tell us. The formulae used in the sanctuary’s inscriptions are entirely consistent with communal practices of munificence and religious observance. Too often, the artworks and frescos from this rich context have been treated apart from this epigraphic evidence. Some gifts, like the *schola* of the Faecii, have been all but ignored. We cannot assess the visual display without full recognition of the fact that these artworks represent both the social aspirations and personal devotions of the dedicators. That so many were repaired, restored, and replaced fits into broader patterns of patronage and gift-giving, in which all members of the cult visible to us today took part, whether their donations were as extensive as the reconstruction of the temple proper or as limited as the contents of an amphora. Patrons selected subjects for their dedications that paid homage both to Isis and to the local religious landscape. As a result, we must imagine that all viewers, not just the Isiaci, were well-equipped to appreciate these gifts. If anything, the donations privilege local traditions and conventions over those that were cult-specific.

In what follows, I build on this foundation to argue for a new reading of the myth paintings from the ekklesiasterion. First, however, a matter of documentation requires attention. The excavators discovered a mosaic inscription in the floor of this space that recorded the names of all three Numerii Popidi, often thought to be further confirmation that Numerius Popidius Ampliatus refinanced much of the structure after the earthquake. The CIL presents the text as follows: *N Popidi Ampliati | N Popidi Celsini |*

Corelia Celsa.⁷¹ Although the mosaic is no longer extant today, an engraving of Giovanni Battista Piranesi (published long after the fact, by his son) provides confirmation of orthography but not the original configuration of the inscription, for it depicts the sections as disarticulated fragments.⁷² Though seemingly simple, the inscription has troubled many editors, for the three names are in different cases. The first two names are genitives, for *Ampliati* can be no other case, but the third is either nominative or ablative. Most assume that all three names should be in the same case and that this grammatical oddity is a mistake in the inscription. Careful attention to the excavation diaries, however, points toward a new reconstruction. The excavation of the ekklesiasterion proceeded in fits and starts, from November 1765 to May 1766. The workers first worked to reveal the mythological paintings – standard practice, which was to clear the walls and edges of a room first. Less usual was the slow pace with which they cleared the fill in the room’s interior. The records suggest that they worked inward from the threshold toward the back wall. The first two names, of N. Popidius Ampliatus and N. Popidius Celsinus, were found on May 2, 1766; the third name, Corelia Celsa, was found on May 10, 1766.⁷³ The editors of the CIL apparently reproduced their information in the order it was recorded by the excavators. Floor mosaics in antiquity, however, were not intended to be read in this way. Rather, the “top” line was located nearest the back wall. Thus, the inscription can be reconstructed: *Corelia Celsa | Numerii Popidii Ampliati | Numerii Popidii Celsini*. On this reconstruction, the inscription needs no emendation. Corelia Celsa is the dedicator, in the nominative, and provides her relationship to her family members in the genitive: “Corelia Celsa, [wife of] Numerius Popidius Ampliatus, [mother of] Numerius Popidius Celsinus.”

That Corelia Celsa was from a prominent local family and free-born suggests she had the means to undertake such an expensive project as the reconstruction of the ekklesiasterion in her own right. Yet whether we understand Corelia Celsa as acting alone or as co-agent with the male members of her family, the implication is that the ekklesiasterion was a dedication or gift, representing either the refurbishment of an existing room after the earthquake or a new addition annexing space from the Samnite Portico.⁷⁴ In either case, we should understand the dedicatory mosaic as referring to a gift that encompassed the construction and decoration of the space from floor to ceiling. A roughly contemporary floor inscription from Nemi, for example, spelled out clearly that the refurbishment of a room within a sanctuary included its décor. A mosaic floor inscription declared that an open room off a portico had been “refined” by one member of the cultic community to serve as a communal space in which dedications made by others could be put on display.⁷⁵ With the understanding that Corelia Celsa (and her family) funded its painting, we may reconsider the myth-cycle of the ekklesiasterion, applying

to its interpretation what we have learned from the other dedications in the sanctuary: it was, by design, intended to appeal both to initiates and to the general public.

TEXT AND CONTEXT: IO AND ISIS IN THE EKKLESIASTERION

The walls of the ekklesiasterion were decorated with “Fourth Style” frescos, with large-scale landscapes flanking the panel paintings. Two mythological panels are preserved, notable for their quality, imposing scale (roughly 1.5 meters by 1.5 meters), and subject matter. Each depicts a stock scene recounting the myth of Io, and together they form one of the rare narrative programs known in Roman painting.⁷⁶ The surviving scenes present the mid-point of the story and its conclusion. In brief, the story goes that Jupiter abducted Io and turned her into a heifer in order to hide his marital transgressions from Juno; Juno acquired Io and placed her under the guard of Argus; Mercury set her free, but, remaining a cow, Io was left to wander the Mediterranean in search of refuge until reaching the banks of the Nile, the site of her eventual return to human form. In literary versions of the story, Jupiter is the agent of her transformation; in the painted cycle, Isis takes on this role. [Plate V, Plate VI] In a break with previous approaches to these paintings, which treat them individually and explain their significance as cultic, I investigate them as a narrative. I interrogate a range of source material but place greatest emphasis on the story as told by Ovid. In so doing, I pursue a line of scholarly inquiry that explores the relationship between visual and textual narration, treating neither as authoritative but as partners in a powerful dialectic that reveals the many associations of Roman viewers and reading audiences.⁷⁷

As with all myths, no single codified version of the story of Io existed; numerous literary traditions treat her genealogy and parentage. Most often she is the daughter of the Argive river god Inachus, the mother of Epaphus, and thereby the progenitor of Danaos.⁷⁸ There was a long-standing conflation of Isis and Io in the Greek tradition, which may have stemmed from similarities in iconography. Herodotus says that Egyptian statues of Isis depict her as a woman but horned like a cow, the same way Greeks depict Io.⁷⁹ This early association may have been an example of contact syncretism, a product of Greek mercenaries and merchants’ encounters with the residents of Late Period Egypt. J. M. Davison notes that in Late Period Egypt, Isis had begun to take on many of the cow-like iconographical features and ritual associations of Hathor.⁸⁰ Yet the earliest explicit mentions of Io as Isis come from Hellenistic poetry, an identification first attested in an epigram of Callimachus, describing a fictive statue “set up in the temple of Isis, daughter of Inachus.”⁸¹ Callimachus is also said to have written a poem, now lost, called *The Arrival of Io*, which perhaps played up the Egyptian setting of the myth.⁸²

Subsequently, Io appears in Lycophron's *Alexandra*, where she is called the "cow-eyed, bull-maiden girl."⁸³ To some, this epithet has suggested a deliberate reference to Isis and the adoption of an Egyptian feature of the myth.⁸⁴ Yet often in Greek vase painting, Io has the physiognomy of a bull rather than a cow; the adjective may be simply descriptive. All of these references are products of their times, and many were influenced by the court of Ptolemaic Alexandria, whose poets stood at the critical juncture of different cultures and who often engaged in complicated semantic and theogonic wordplay in mediating them.⁸⁵

A threshold question is whether we should consider the association of the two goddesses to reflect ritual practice in Pompeii or elsewhere. The most important source attesting the cultic association of the deity and the heroine is a late first or early second century CE liturgical text from Oxyrhynchus, a list detailing the many names and guises of Isis. One line reads "at Meniouis, [Isis is called] "seated before Io in whose honor ... is founded."⁸⁶ This epithet is tantalizing because, as Jean-Claude Grenier has argued, it appears to accord well with the imagery in the ekklesiasterion paintings in which Isis sits in front of Io.⁸⁷ Yet the text raises as many questions as it answers. The line is corrupt, falling at a place of particular damage on the papyrus roll, and the language may alternately be read to imply that Isis rules or governs a territory.⁸⁸ The thrust of the liturgy in its entirety is to praise Isis by proclaiming her sovereignty over the towns of Egypt, the known world, and beyond, describing Isis as she is named in Greece, Italy, Persia, India, Arabia, and "in the land of the Amazons." In other words, like the aretaologies from the Roman-period Greek East and Apuleius' invocations of Isis, the Oxyrhynchus papyrus attests to a mode of allegorical speech common to cult practice. It does not, however, characterize the actual beliefs or practices of the residents of the places it includes. Although one graffito from Philae names Isis as Inachis, there are no attestations of this epithet in ritual contexts or dedications from Roman Italy.⁸⁹ To understand the relationship between the goddesses that would be normative for a Pompeian audience, we must look to sources closer to home.

A number of imperial-period Latin poets made reference to the story of Io in passing, perhaps paying homage to the work of the Republican poet Calvus; late antique scholiasts say that Calvus wrote a poem called the *Io*, which was held in high regard by his peers.⁹⁰ Latin poets had a particular interest in her transformation into a cow watched over by Argus. Vergil, for instance, described an image of Io on the fictive shield of Turnus: "And, in gold, Io with upturned horns emblazoned the light shield. An impressive motif: [Io] already covered with bristles, already a cow, and also Argus, the guardian (*custos*) of the maiden, and her father Inachus pouring out a river from an engraved urn."⁹¹ Propertius too made reference to Argus and Io. In one poem, he uses a simile that likens the gaze of the authorial persona to

that of Argus: “transfixed, I clung with intent eyes, just as Argus [gazed at] the unfamiliar horns of the daughter of Inachus”.⁹² In another, annoyed at Cynthia’s vows of chastity, he reprises the story of Io in summary, as if in ridicule of Isis.⁹³ Ovid not only recounts her transformations at length in the *Metamorphoses*, but also offers a condensed version in the *Heroides*.⁹⁴ Taken all together, these references suggest that tales of Io were in wide currency, and of strong interest to reading audiences. Augustan poets also showed interest in Isis, often referring to her explicitly through the adoption of Callimachus’ Greek patronymic Ἰσυχίδης, rendered in Latin *Inachis*, tantamount to typical Augustan “Alexandrianism” and name-play.⁹⁵

Contemporary visual depictions, too, confirm the wide appeal of the story. Roman-period renderings of the myth in visual media belong almost exclusively to a series of frescoes dating to the mid-first century CE.⁹⁶ [Appendix 3.3] As noted, both paintings from the ekklesiasterion are multiples, that is, “copies” of paintings known in more than one location. Three visual versions of the Io myth appear to have been in currency from the Augustan period on: scenes that juxtapose Argus, Mercury, and Io, of which the north wall painting from the ekklesiasterion is a variant; scenes that feature Io and Argus standing to either side of a large rock; and scenes that shows Io’s arrival in Egypt, greeted by Isis, of which the south wall painting is a variant. Scholarly discussion once focused on questions relating to the lost originals of these works. The panels depicting Io, Argus, and Mercury were thought to derive from a painting of the Athenian master Nikias described by Pliny the Elder, perhaps brought to Rome by Augustus.⁹⁷ That the earliest known of this series, a panel from the so-called House of Livia on the Palatine, has Greek figure-labels argues for a Greek origin of the scenes. Yet similar figural types, especially the seated Io with budding horns, appear widely in Greek vases from a number of geographic regions, including Campania and south Italy; it is difficult to link the figures to a single iconographic tradition.⁹⁸ Pliny’s description of the lost painting of Nikias lacks sufficient detail to support convincing arguments for an authoritative original and indeed, read carefully, suggests that Nikias included Io without supporting figures, rendering more tenuous any relationship with the extant paintings.⁹⁹ It is most profitable to consider the Io, Argus, and Mercury paintings as a mutable series in which stock figures could be moved or manipulated within the frame to suit the patron’s specifications or the spatial requirements of the mural composition.¹⁰⁰ In point of fact, those scenes featuring Io and Argus alone were most commonly reproduced. [Figure 3.9, Figure 3.10] Furthermore, these figure types also appear in other media; a version of the Io-Argus scene, for example, appears also in a wall mosaic.¹⁰¹ Although there are fewer variants of the scene of Io at the Canopus, it too is a multiple, known in one near-exact iteration from the House of the Duke D’Aumale. The prototype is thought to be a painting of Ptolemaic or Alexandrian origin, though no visual evidence confirms

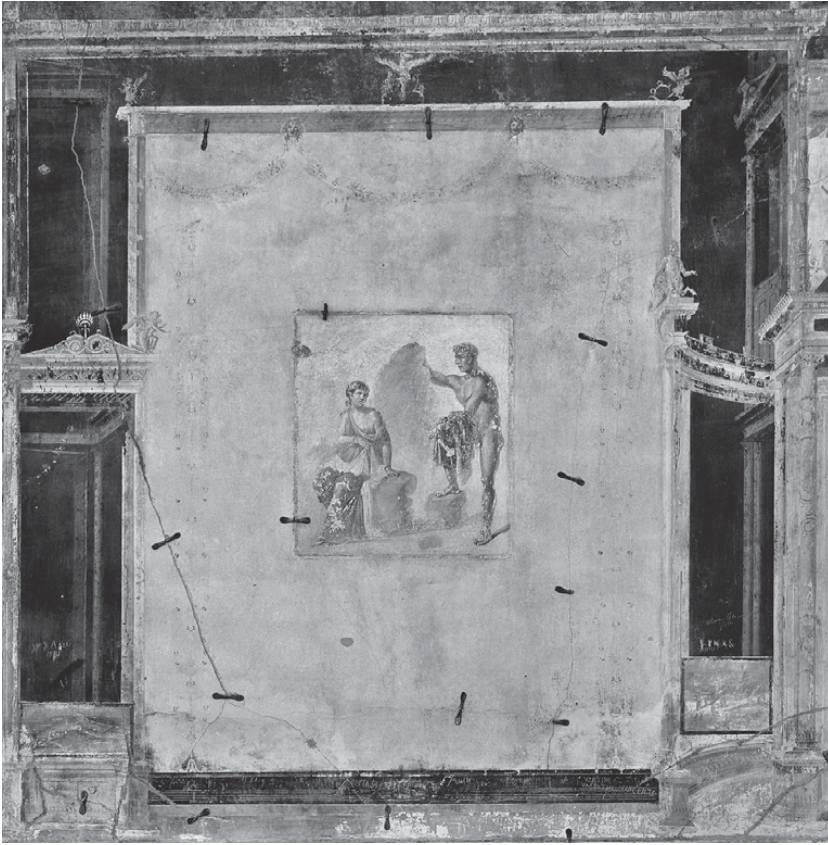


FIGURE 3.9. Painting of Io and Argus from the House of the Menander, Pompeii (I 10,4), variant with two figures flanking a large rock (late first century CE).

Photo credit: © Vanni Archive / Art Resource, NY.

this hypothesis.¹⁰² [Figure 3.11] On balance, then, the evidence suggests that a number of different painters' workshops in Pompeii had versions of these myth panels on offer, and the fact that these images appear in so many iterations allows us to state with certainty that they were recognizable.

What is unique about the cycle in the temple of Isis is not that both scenes are multiples, but that they form a single narrative. Formal consideration of the two *ekklesiasterion* paintings highlights their design as pendants. The painting on the north wall shows Io's rescue from Argus. The landscape is sparse, dominated by a series of boulders, upon which the figures sit, lean, or rest. Io sits to the left, with a cow visible at her left shoulder; she wears a purple garment with a blue border draped over her waist and sports budding crescent horns. Mercury stands at the center, leaning forward to show a *syrinx*, or pan-pipes, to Argus, who sits below him, arms folded in repose and resting on a shepherd's crook. On the wall facing, the painting illustrates Io's return to human form, transformed by the touch of Isis. Io, framed by her billowing



FIGURE 3.10. Painting of Io and Argus from an unknown house in Pompeii, variant with two figures flanking a large rock (mid-first century CE).

Photo credit: Neg. D-DAI-Rom 72.3304R.



FIGURE 3.11. Painting of Isis welcoming Io to Egypt from the House of the Duke d'Aumale, Pompeii (VI 7,15) (late first century CE).

Photo credit: © Vanni Archive / Art Resource, NY.

drapery, sits upon the back of a personified Nile; Isis is to the left and slightly below, with Harpocrates at her side and two initiates behind. Although using widely disseminated types, the painters have created compositional and iconographical unity throughout. Io's hair and drapery, for instance, are consistent across both panels. In each, she occupies the upper left of the frame, counterbalanced by a seated figure to the lower right. In the north wall painting, this is Argus; in the south wall painting, it is Isis. The narratives thus unfold in mirror image, as Io turns *away* from Argus and Mercury on the north wall but *toward* Isis on the south wall. The cumulative effect emphasizes the action at the center, in each case a pregnant moment of dramatic confrontation: the conversation between Argus and Mercury resulting in Io's escape, and the communion of Io and Isis resulting in her return to human form. The large size of these myth paintings means that they dominated the room; in conjunction with the landscapes that surrounded them, they evoked Egypt in a way that made the far-off land feel immediate.

In what follows, I explore this narrative by reading the paintings in conjunction with the fullest literary account of the story in currency during the period, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The selection of this source material is not capricious: graffiti from Pompeii make clear that many residents of the city possessed a sophisticated knowledge of literary texts and show that they had particular appreciation of Augustan poetry through to the city's final years. Ovid was one of the most popular authors in the city. [Appendix 3.4] Even brief consideration of the literary graffiti shows that Pompeians not only knew Augustan poetry by rote, but engaged actively with this material, sampling it to suit their own purposes. Almost one-fifth of all literary graffiti exhibit creative adaptation of one form or another, and often these responses occur in groups or duplicates, as if those who wrote them were responding to other graffiti-writers.¹⁰³ This fact opens to our view the semantic play and engagement of the Roman viewer. A poetic text was not an unchallenged authority, but a powerful tool for enhancing dramatic tension.

Strong evidence suggests that educated Pompeians brought popular poetry to bear on the mythological scenes decorating public and private buildings. Herica Valladares has shown, for example, that Ovid's *Metamorphoses* inspired a series of paintings from the House of D. Octavius Quartio.¹⁰⁴ And in the house of Marcus Lucretius Fronto, couplets recounting a version of the story of Pero and Micon were professionally painted onto a scene of the same figures, along with labels. Like the panels from the Temple of Isis, this painting is known to be a multiple, also attested in a mirror-image version in the triclinium of IX 2,5. In the House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto, the label text was a deliberate addition, intended to enhance the visual story.¹⁰⁵ Yet while poetry may have influenced paintings (and the ways that viewers read them), written work did not dictate painted content. The three mythological paintings from Ala 4 in the House of the Menander are a useful comparison because they

too comprise a programmatic narrative ensemble. All three walls of the room featured scenes relating to the fall of Troy: on the south wall, Laocoön and his sons, beset by snakes; on the east wall, Cassandra with the Trojan horse; and on the north wall, Cassandra resisting abduction by Ajax. These paintings draw inspiration from Vergil's account but also nod to other sources, including what we assume was a commonly recognizable sculptural type epitomized by the Vatican Laocoön.¹⁰⁶ In rare instances, we can even investigate this interpretative process in action. A literary graffito, for example, was inscribed freehand directly onto a painting of Phaedra and Hippolytus in the tablinum of a modest house (V 2,10). The scene showed Phaedra, seated and accompanied by her nurse holding a wax tablet, and Hippolytus standing, accompanied by a servant holding the reins of a horse. Underneath the figure of the nurse, the anonymous author quoted Ovid's *Heroides*, nodding to the first words of a line in the poem.¹⁰⁷ Here, then, we have preserved one viewer's response to the imagery, a bon mot that played upon both visual and textual versions of the story: the viewer inscribed a line from Phaedra's letter onto the figure of her emissary, who holds what may be the letter itself.

In the sanctuary of Isis, the north wall painting with Io, Argus, and Mercury opens the narrative and draws upon the story as imagined in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Both this myth-panel and its closest parallel, from the House of the Citharist (a mirror-image iteration, though the figures differ in details of dress), include a number of elements inspired by the poem. [Figure 3.12] In the paintings, as in Ovid, Argus is a shepherd, leaning on an upended crook. In the House of the Citharist, he wears a herdsman's high boots and cloak. In each, Mercury holds a set of pan-pipes or a syrinx, also a nod to the *Metamorphoses*. Ovid tied Io's story together with the thematically similar, aetioloical tale of Syrinx, the nymph who turned into a stand of musical reeds. In his telling of the Io story, Mercury played the pan-pipes sweetly to attract Argus' attention, and then told him the story of their creation in order to lull him to sleep so that he might kill him.¹⁰⁸ The composition of the paintings, too, emphasizes this power dynamic. Mercury is heavysset and strong; his standing position in the composition in both the Temple of Isis and the House of the Citharist controls the action; Argus, seated below, looks up from a position of subservience. Read with Ovid, then, the painting series arrests the narrative at a pregnant moment, as Mercury concludes his tale and just before Argus' violent death.¹⁰⁹ A closer look at Ovid's text therefore helps us unpack the expectations of the Roman reader and viewer, confronted with this moment of high tension.

Ovid's portrayal of Io plays on the readers' sympathies. Jupiter praises her extraordinary beauty and describes her as of ideal marriageable age, "about to make some man happy, I don't know whom, with the marriage pillow."¹¹⁰ Throughout, Ovid defines Io by her family relationships. At the start of the story, she has only just left her father's presence, and even after her

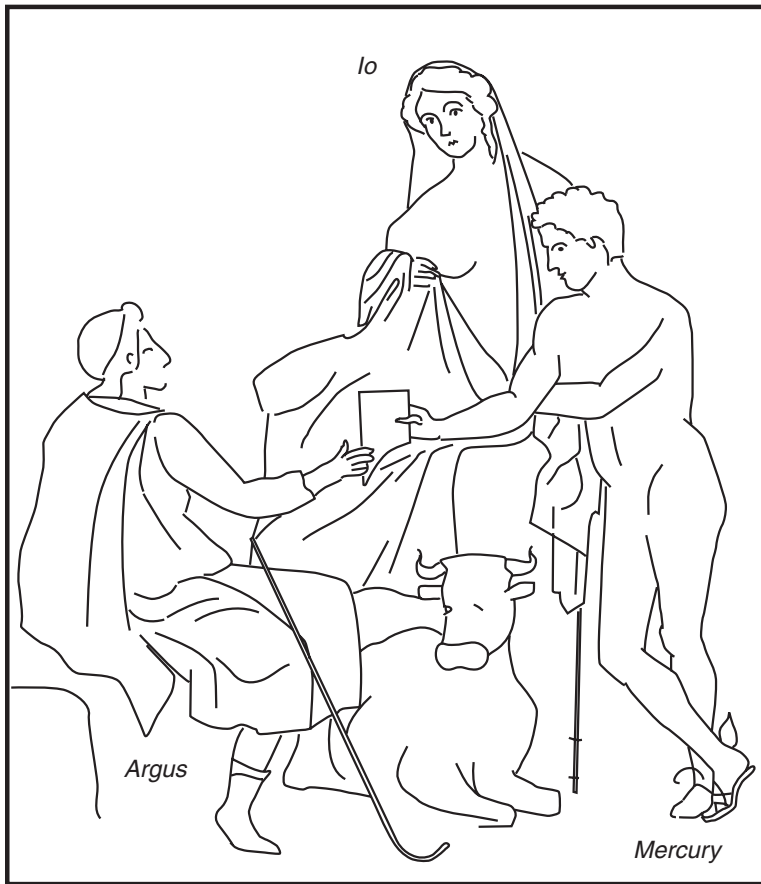


FIGURE 3.12. Line drawing, painting of Io, Argus, and Mercury from the House of the Citharist, Pompeii (I 4, 5) variant with three figures (mid-first century CE).

Drawing credit: Karen Rasmussen, Archeographics.

transformation into a cow she attempts to return to her family. Above all, her father mourns the loss of her potential as a wife and mother: “And I, unknowing, was preparing a wedding bed and torches for you, and my first hope was of a son-in-law, the second [hope] of grandsons. Now your husband must be had from the flock, and from the flock, a son.”¹¹¹ Io’s transformation into a cow, in other words, changes her essential nature in no way. She retains her remarkable beauty, and she recognizes and wants to communicate with her family,¹¹² yet she has lost what her father valued most in her, the ability to contribute to future generations.

Argus plays an active role in Io’s sufferings, and her experiences under his watchful eyes are anything but pleasant: she must eat bitter grass, drink muddy water, and sleep upon bare earth, intolerable for a girl who had been led to expect for herself a cushion or *torus*, a word which by metonymy indicates a marriage bed.¹¹³ Almost as soon as her father recognizes her, Argus

comes between them. “Starry Argus leads the girl away, as she grieves over such things. He drags the daughter, seized from her father, into new pastures.”¹¹⁴ Ovid’s language recalls the rape that forcibly removed her from her father’s household. Yet, in other ways, Ovid nuances his portrait of Argus to create a subtle irony. He may nod to Vergil in referring to Argus as the *custos Iunonius*, which emphasizes his role as the guardian or protector of the interests and property of his patron, while also suggesting that he is a jailor.¹¹⁵ Further, he describes Argus as one of the Arestorides, using an obscure patronymic otherwise unattested in Latin poetry.¹¹⁶ This epithet casts Argus as of heroic parentage and may even suggest that he shared a familial connection to Io; Pausanias later reports that Arestor was married to the toponymic Mycene, another of Inachus’ daughters.¹¹⁷ Thus, even as Io searches desperately for her family and laments the loss of her potential as a wife and mother, she finds herself in the care of a distant relative.

Although Argus’ death at Mercury’s hands sets Io free, the act is ambiguous rather than cathartic: all is not as it seems, and Argus’ untimely death stains the landscape around it. Throughout the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid’s landscapes play a crucial role, tableaux that draw on distinctly Roman cultural ideas of place, space, and the social act of viewing.¹¹⁸ The setting for the confrontation is an outcrop of rock, described as both the pinnacle of a mountain (*cacumen*, 1.666) and a boulder (*saxo*, 1.679; 1.718). When at last confronted by Mercury, Argus speaks politely, “And you, whoever you are, you may sit with me upon this rock,” Argus said, “for truly the grass is not more abundant in any place, and you see the shade is suited to shepherds.”¹¹⁹ In so doing, he presumes the two are equals and plays the part of a host. As he falls asleep, Mercury springs into action, cutting Argus’ head from his body. “He threw the bloody thing from the rock, and stained the jagged cliff with gore.”¹²⁰ The word choice calls to mind the act of throwing social pariahs, scapegoats, and the physically deformed off the Tarpeian rock in Rome.¹²¹ In one sense, this is a suitable death for Argus, viewed as a monster. It is a powerful reversal of fortunes as the jailor meets a criminal’s end. In a second sense, however, it is jarring, an act of sudden violence against the powerless and unaware Argus, as the guest kills his host. Ovid uses a verb to describe the blood-stained rock, which often indicates a ritual transgression.¹²² As if to emphasize this latter view, Ovid shifts at the conclusion of the scene to address Argus in an apostrophe: “Argus, (here) you lie, what light you had in so many eyes has been put out, and one night occupies a hundred eyes.”¹²³ In emulating the genre of funerary epigram, Ovid encourages his readers to rest and reflect. This pause sets up an etymological wordplay on the Greek adjective ἀργός, meaning both “shining” and “at rest.”¹²⁴ Argus is now both. His death, however, brings no resolution for Io, who – in both painted and textual versions of the story – remains a passive participant in the events that unfold before her and decide her fate.

The south wall scene of Isis and Io offers the viewer the awaited catharsis. Although this panel has received the lion's share of scholarly attention, few have remarked on the way it offers a *détournement* to the established narrative, in which one would expect Jupiter to be the agent of Io's return to human form. Scholarly interpretations of the south wall instead consider it in isolation, and have investigated the imagery as operative within the *interpretatio Graeca* of Egyptian religion.¹²⁵ Three features of the painting have attracted scrutiny: the depiction of Isis as seated facing Io, the crocodile beneath Isis' feet, and the representation of the Nile. As noted earlier, Jean-Claude Grenier has correctly stressed that there were ritual traditions in which Isis was known as "seated before Io in whose honor ... is founded."¹²⁶ Because the text is a liturgy, it is possible that the south wall painting illustrated or explicated a name of Isis as she was known to some who worshipped her. The manner of representing the goddess with her feet upon a crocodile may nod to Egyptian iconographical traditions in which Isis or Horus appear to stand on the back of a crocodile or other nilotic animal. On this view, the motif here would illustrate Isis' ability to control the forces of chaos.¹²⁷ Even the manner of representing the Nile may have cultic resonance. The visual depiction of the river here draws on the widely known "type" of the personified Nile, which imagines him as a bearded deity and often associates him with a sphinx.¹²⁸ Unusual, however, is the way the painting appears to illustrate the river running from its source, represented by the rocks, all the way to the Delta, perhaps thereby making reference to sacred lands near Philae.¹²⁹ And the story of Io told in its entirety might have reminded the cult's initiates of the story of Isis herself: just as Io was forced to travel far and wide in search of her own salvation, so too did Isis in search of the body of Osiris.¹³⁰ All of these interpretations illuminate the "initiate's eye view" of the scene, in that they presume a viewer with ample specialized and cultic knowledge. Yet in doing so, they downplay the fact that these scenes were multiples – not unique commissions to serve a ritual function.

Let us begin by considering the expected end to the story as it appears in Ovid and other sources, and then examine the solution offered by the south wall scene. In most versions of the myth, Jupiter is the divine agent of Io's return to human form, effected by a therapeutic touch that ends her travails and impregnates her. In the *Metamorphoses*, Io reaches Egypt after having been driven around the world by a vengeful fury. When at last she arrives on the banks of the Nile, she collapses and begs Jupiter to end her sufferings. Ovid emphasizes the moment through a shift of voice, addressing the Nile directly:

You, Nile, stood as the final thing to her immense suffering; as soon as she touched you, she lay down with her knees placed on the shore of the riverbank, uplifted with her neck thrown back, lifting to the stars the only face she was able, and with moaning, and tears, and a mournful moo, she seemed to complain with Jupiter, and to beg for an end of her torments.¹³¹

Io's posture is significant: Ovid plays upon her dual animal and human nature. Adopting her internal perspective, as a human woman trapped in an animal's body, she falls to her knees in a posture of prayer.¹³² Adopting an external perspective, from which one sees nothing but a beast and hears only the lowing of a cow, Io adopts the pose of an animal sacrifice, knees curled under and neck thrown back, exposed for the kill. It is because Jupiter is so moved by this pitiful sight of Io in prayer and offering herself as a sacrifice that he returns her to human form. Ovid concludes the story by stating that Io is henceforth no longer a girl but a goddess: "Now the most famous goddess is worshipped by the linen-wearing crowd."¹³³ She is mother to Epaphus, a divine child, born of Jupiter and named after his touch, a deity in his own right.¹³⁴ Ovid does not directly conflate Isis and Io, but strongly hints that there is a relationship between them. He uses a rare adjective to describe the crowd of Egyptians, *linigera*, which he reserves for Isis elsewhere in his corpus.¹³⁵ Scholiasts, moreover, certainly understood this passage to refer directly to Isis. The *Narrationes*, a guide to the transformations in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* written in the mid-second to mid-third centuries CE, condenses the story to its barest elements:

The aforementioned Io into Isis

The aforementioned Io, after she had run through the entire world, driven by the furies, last of all was brought to Egypt and – with Juno placated by Jupiter – returned to her pristine form. She accepted the name of the goddess Isis, and was called "linen-wearing."¹³⁶

Io's entire story thus becomes aetiology, poetic explication of the patronymic *Inachis* as the epithet and identity of the goddess Isis. Though we will never be able to say with certainty, in so doing Ovid may deliberately nod to and even resolve his account with other mythographic traditions. Here again the existence of Callimachus' lost *Arrival of Io* looms large. Yet it matters little whether this ending to the story was Ovid's innovation or clever allusion. The broader point is that the association of the two goddesses was not specialized cultic knowledge, but apparently widely known to Roman authors and readers.

Brief consideration of later myth-handbooks illustrates the same point. Writing in the second century CE, for example, Hyginus states that Jupiter was the agent of Io's transformation and that he turned her into Isis: "From that place [she went] into Egypt, where she brought forth Epaphus. Of Jupiter, when he learned that she had borne so many hardships because of his own deeds, he restored her own proper form to her, and caused her to be the goddess of the Egyptians, who is now called Isis."¹³⁷ In the roughly contemporary account of Apollodorus, the story differs in small particulars. Io does not become Isis but rather the queen of the Egyptians and an adherent of

Isis: "She set up a representation of Demeter, whom the Egyptians call Isis. Similarly, they address Io as Isis."¹³⁸ Because these sources were intended as educator's tools and reading aids, they serve as evidence of common variants of the myths they recount. We can conclude accordingly that stories in which Io became Isis were commonplace, as were alternates in which Io became one of Isis' devotees, suggested by the dedication of a statue in her honor.

Although on first blush the end of the myth presented in the south wall painting appears surprising, it does not entirely undercut the audience's expectations. Rather, it makes explicit the known relationship between the two goddesses. In many respects, in fact, the depiction of Io's arrival in Egypt fits well with literary accounts: Io's transformation occurs on the banks of the Nile, here personified and lifting the heroine on his back; the "linen-wearing" crowd is present, too, in the person of the male and female figures clothed in appropriate garb and holding cultic implements, the sistrum and the caduceus, both common in representations of the veneration of Isis. The critical difference is that Isis is the agent of Io's transformation, shown with her own divine child Harpocrates at her side. The narrative moment is the touch that will return Io to human form. As thus framed, this scene both presents a cathartic end to the tale and is a pregnant moment just before Io's dramatic return to human form and implied apotheosis. The painting suggests that the two deities will become one, but also leaves significant room for interpretation. Both panels in the ekklesiasterion invite the audience to consider the story of Io from start to finish, drawing on source material known to them from common visual and literary sources.

Yet consideration of the two panels as a narrative also leads to the inevitable question: why was this story, with its emphasis on Io rather than Isis, suited to the sanctuary context and to the ekklesiasterion in particular? Generally speaking, Roman temples served a range of functions, providing neutral ground for social gatherings, serving as impromptu offices for officials, and acting as galleries for the display of artworks and other treasures. Vitruvius, for example, notes that the Egyptian temples were places where moneylenders could often be found.¹³⁹ The layout of the ekklesiasterion suggests a space of wide utility, suitable for informal or formal gatherings of the cult members and the community. As noted earlier, the excavators found fineware and cooking implements, suggesting the room was used at times for dining. The public nature of the space suggests one answer to this question, then. Those who put their gifts on public display, as discussed earlier, aimed for their gifts to be widely appreciated. The subject matter of the Io myth was not only well known in the city's private houses, but was manifestly appropriate to public spaces, as the painting of Io and Argus from the Macellum shows. As recounted in the sanctuary, the story of Io conferred glory on Isis but without revealing her mysteries. Additionally, for initiates, the narrative and scenes could be doubly

resonant: the image of Io, seated before Isis, perhaps evoked the language of prayer;¹⁴⁰ the image of Isis with her feet upon the crocodile stressed her mercies;¹⁴¹ an anthropoid sarcophagus in one of the landscapes could refer to the body and burial of Osiris.¹⁴² Many of these readings look to source material far beyond the Pompeian context for these religious associations. We need not look so far afield, however, for confirmation that the figure of Isis, as inserted here into Io's story, could resonate with sacred knowledge. The shrine paintings of the sacrarium, certainly known to the initiates but less accessible to casual visitors, depict Isis as having power over life and death, about to revive Osiris. The "Ovidian" reading of the Io cycle that I have suggested emphasizes common themes of death, rebirth, and the generation of new life associated with Isis' powers. For those viewers possessed of cultic knowledge, then, the story of Io as told in the ekklesiastērion culminates in the girl's ritual initiation and assimilation to Isis herself. That Apuleius refers to initiates as reborn (*renati*), too, suggests that for many followers, the story might resonate on a deeply personal level: Isis grants new life to all those who believe in her.

* * *

I have advocated throughout this chapter for a decidedly contextual approach to the sanctuary of Isis, taking account of the richness of the archival and material record and situating the sculptures and paintings within local practices of artistic display, civic munificence, and literacy. There can be no sophisticated account of the reception of artworks that does not take equal account of their audiences: who came into contact with them and under what circumstances. Above all, the sanctuary of Isis in Pompeii offers us a chance to look at a place of veneration in exquisite detail. The picture I have painted is of a group of self-identified worshippers deeply connected to their community, tied to its civic and religious life, and aware of their place in its recent history. My account has not tried to be comprehensive. There is much to say about the complex interplay of painting, stucco, architecture, and sculpture in this context. In all cases, however, it is paramount to keep in mind that the viewers here are not constructs but identifiable individuals, each with his or her own complicated history, identity, and agenda. As a result, there is no simple or single aesthetic governing the selection of artworks in this setting, and no unilateral interpretation of the sanctuary's artworks that can account for the entire audience. Sculptures, paintings, and even entire rooms emerge as the end products of a number of social negotiations and artistic choices, from acts of the town council that controlled public space to the selection of well-known sculptural and painted types that could be tailored, through application of pigment or gilding, to suit each dedicator's tastes, both the personal and the devotional.

Reference	Location ¹	Text
10.814	on two herms, of which one was found in the Chalcidicum and the other in the Temple of Isis	C(aii) Norbani Soricis Secundarum mag(istri) pagi Aug(usti) felicis suburbani ex d(ecreto) d(ecurionum) loc(us) dat(us) <i>The magistri of the pagus suburbanus of Augustus Felix [placed this statue] of C. Norbanus Sorex, [player] of second parts; the place was given by decree of the town council.</i>
RICIS 504/0206	Unknown	Isidi Aug(ustae) Manilia Chrysa v(otum) [s(olvit)] <i>To Isis Augustua, Manilia Chrysa resolved the vow.</i>
10.815	six examples were found in Pompeii, one in the neighborhood of the tombs on a herm; one in the temple of Isis in a place not its own (used as a decorative plank on the niche where rested the Egyptian idol, turned upside down), the third and fourth in the small theater on herms lacking heads; the fifth also in the Chalcidicum near the entrance; one broken herm was seen in the Forum Triangulare by Schoenus in 1866.	M(arcus) Lucretius Rufus legavit <i>Marcus Lucretius Rufus bequeathed it.</i>

¹ Notes on location derive from the CIL.

² See discussion in text for this reconstruction.

³ For “suo” see discussion in text.

APPENDIX 3.2. DIPINTI NEAR THE SANCTUARY OF ISIS

Reference	Location	Text
4.1011	on the Via Stabiana located under CIL 4.1007	Cuspium Pansam aed[ilem] Popidius Natalis cliens cum isiacis rog[at] <i>Popidius Natalis, the client, asks for Cuspium Pansa for aedile.</i>
4.787	on the street that passes in front of the Temple of Isis, on the wall of the house that stands directly across from the entrance of the same temple.	Cn(aeum) Helvium Sabinum Aed(ilem) Isiaci Universi rog[ant] <i>All the Isiaci ask for Gn. Helvius Sabinus for aedile.</i>

APPENDIX 3.3. MULTIPLES AND ADAPTATIONS: IO PANEL PAINTINGS

Io, Argus, and Mercury		
Location/Description	Date	Notes
The so-called House of Livia, Palatine, Rome: sacroidyllic landscape with smaller scale figures, Io seated at center; Argus to right with hand on the rock; Mercury, left, emerging behind rock.	c. 20 BCE	<i>Io and Hermes labeled in Greek; Argus not labeled.</i> Yalouris 1992, no. 61
House of Io and Argus, Herculaneum: rocky landscape with smaller scale figures: Io, seated, to upper center; Argus seated in foreground; Mercury holding syrinx	“Second–Third Style,” date unknown	<i>No longer extant</i> Yalouris 1992, 38
Sanctuary of Isis, Pompeii: Io seated to upper left with a cow in background; Mercury center, holding syrinx; Argus, seated right.	62–79 CE	Yalouris 1992, no. 36 PPM VIII, 825
House of the Citharist, Pompeii [I 4, 5]: Io seated center rear, with a cow beneath; in foreground, Mercury holding syrinx, standing to right, facing Argus, seated to left	c. 70 CE (?)	Yalouris 1992, no. 37 PPM I, 129
Io and Argus		
Location/Description	Date	Notes
House IX 9, d, Pompeii:		
Io seated to left; large rock to center; Argus to right with hand on rock	“Third style”	Yalouris 1992, no. 45 PPM X, 91
Macellum, Pompeii [VII 9, 7]: Io seated to left; large rock to center; Argus standing, foot on smaller rock	after 65 CE	Yalouris 1992, no. 47 PPM VII, 346
House of Meleager, Pompeii [VI 9, 2]: Io seated to left, Argus to right, holding long staff and with foot on smaller rock	“Fourth Style”	Yalouris 1992, no. 48 PPM IV, 681
House of the Dioscuri, Pompeii [VI 9, 6]: Io seated to left; rock to center; Argus to right, holding a staff or baton	mid-first century CE (?)	Yalouris 1992, no. 49
House of the Queen of England, Pompeii [VII 14, 5]: Io seated to left; rock to center; Argus standing to right with foot on support, hand on rock, holding a staff	date unknown	Yalouris 1992, no. 50 PPM VII, 683
House IX 2, 18, Pompeii: Io seated to left; rock to center; Argus to right	“Third Style”	<i>No longer extant</i> Yalouris 1992, no. 51
from unknown house in Pompeii, Io seated to left, rock to center, Argus with hand on rock (heavily damaged)	“Third Style”	DAI 72.3304

APPENDIX 3.4. GRAFFITI QUOTING OR ADAPTING OVID FROM POMPEII

Reference	Location	Text	Notes
4.1520	“Vico degli scienziati”	candida me d[oc]uit nigras odisse puellas odero se[po]tero sed non invitus amabo scripsit venus fiscia pompeiana	Ov. <i>Am.</i> 3.11.35, adapted, cf. partial examples in close proximity: 4.1526, 4.1528, 4.1523
4.1595	Exterior of a house, “to the left of the spacious street that goes through the gate called Nola”	[ser]pentis lusus si qui sibi forte notavit Sepumius iuvenis quos fac(i)t ingenio spectator scaenae sive es studiosus e[q]uorum sic habeas [lanc]es se[mp] er ubiq[ue] pares]	Ov. <i>Am.</i> 3.2.1, adapted; Ov. <i>Her.</i> 20.205, adapted. Letters formed in the shape of a snake
4.1893, 4.1894	Basilica	surda sit oranti tua ianua laxa ferenti audiat exclusi verba receptus [am]an[s] ianitor ad dantis vigilet si pulsatur inanis surdus in obductam somniet usq[ue] seram	Ov. <i>Am.</i> 1.8.77-8, adapted with Prop. 5.5.47, listed as separate entry CIL 4.1894 but perhaps intended as single verse.
4.1895	Basilica	quid pote tan durum saxo aud quid mollius unda dura tamen molli saxa cavantur aqua	Ov. <i>Ars am.</i> 1.475–6, adapted, variant from ms. tradition; perhaps same hand as CIL 4.1894
4.3149	“Vico di Balbo”	militat omnes [sic]	Ovid <i>Ars am.</i> 1.9.1
4.4133	House V 2,10, tablinum	non ego socia no eco	Reference to Ov. <i>Her.</i> 4.17, inscribed on panel painting of Hippolytus, Phaedra, and the nurse “non ego socia” was written underneath the figure of the nurse; “non eco” was written on her garments. Cf. CIL 4.4134, 4.135 for legends under Hippolytus, reading vciiti and Latona, respectively
4.9847	II 1, 10 taverna	Candida me docuit nigras o[d]isse puellas odero si potero si non invitus amabo	Ov. <i>Am.</i> 3.11.35, adapted

4

IMAGES OF EGYPT: LAND AT THE LIMIT OF BELIEF

What did Romans in Italy think about the place and people of Egypt, its history, its religion? What was the appeal of the representations of Egyptians and their land – visual and textual tropes – that proliferated in the period following annexation and that provided glimpses into the lifestyle of people living so far away? There are no easy answers to these seemingly simple questions. So varied were ideas about Egypt that authors can appear diametrically opposed in their characterizations, caught between idealizing approaches that held up Egypt as the source of culture and learning and moralizing approaches that criticized its residents as barbaric and lazy. Even as Roman authors and artists generated new ideas about the land at the limit of their own empire, they were also the inheritors of a rich, preexisting, Greek discourse about that place, which included conceptions that were long-standing and not easily dispelled.

Herodotus described Egypt as a land of ancient wisdom, architectural marvels, and unusual gods. Yet, relative to Greek norms, his Egypt was an upside-down land where women went to market while men stayed home to weave, where the common cat could be held sacrosanct.¹ Herodotus was followed by many others, who built on his portrait of Egypt and added their own information: Eudoxus, Plato, Hecataeus of Abdera, Manetho. Recent work situates these authors carefully within their historical contexts and reveals the complex ways that authors played with highly constructed notions of “the other,” their many Egypts acting as shadow-boxes for the display of idiosyncratic conceptions of Hellenic identity and authority.² Nor was Egyptian culture voiceless. Egyptian modes of thought and history-writing exerted a lasting influence; Egyptians were not simply subjects of the outsider lens, but also participants in the dialogue.³ References to Egypt or characterizations of it are so ubiquitous that they are to be found in all literary genres, treatments of myth, poetry, history, and so on. Authors in the Roman period, too, discussed Egypt, in both Latin and Greek.⁴ Careful critical attention to selected works (such as Tibullus’ elegy to Messalla or Plutarch’s *de Iside et Osiride*)

has shown how sophisticated the play upon the nature of Egyptian mythic traditions could be, at once establishing Egypt as the source of deities with miraculous abilities and revealing deep-seated elite anxieties and ambivalence.⁵ Yet a number of factors render the Roman-period discourse on Egypt especially complex, for it is more difficult to situate the information provided by authors within a single social or historical context.

Even after centuries of Ptolemaic and Roman rule, the accounts of Herodotus and other authors remained in circulation and continued to shape thought about Egypt's land, history, and people, though they were long out of date. Composed in the fourth century CE, close to the end of the ancient historiographic tradition treating Egypt, the extended digression in Ammianus Marcellinus serves as something of a bookend to Herodotus' seminal description of the place. Ammianus touches on the antiquity of Egypt's civilization, its history, geography, and climate, the violent and exotic character of its animals, the construction of the pyramids, and the contribution of its scholars to knowledge.⁶ All of these topics were favorites of writers in antiquity. Ammianus' account is notable, however, in that he identifies many of the sources of his information and had traveled to Egypt himself. He makes overt reference to Homer, Herodotus, and Juba and seems to reveal knowledge of others, such as Lucan, Diodorus Siculus, and Pliny.⁷ At one point, he questions his sources directly in describing the origin of the Nile: "but since the story-telling poets and differing geographers split this obscure topic into contrary reports, I will set forth in a brief space those opinions close to the truth, as I judge it."⁸ Ammianus thus shows his knowledge of long-standing traditional views of Egypt and its history while also employing his own critical eye. Even so, a number of general stereotypes infiltrate his supposedly factual account. Elsewhere, he describes the people of Egypt as prone to rebellion, deceitful, and lazy, relying in the fourth century CE on enduring stereotypes that date to at least the fifth century BCE.⁹

As even this brief example suggests, understanding the opinions about Egypt espoused by Roman-period authors is complicated by the fact that they moved fluidly between describing a "real" place of the present and an "idealized" place of the past, drawn from hearsay and a fount of common knowledge. In so doing, they sometimes applied to the people of Egypt the same assumptions they employed to what might seem less changeable features of a place, such as its landscape and the animals that populated it. Ancient authors often improved on the information of their sources, as is the case, for example, in Pliny's discussion of the hippopotamus, which draws on both Aristotle and Herodotus but adds information based on autopsy of the animals in Rome.¹⁰ The broader point is that the discourse on Egypt of which the Romans were both inheritors and perpetuators often melded the contemporary with the anachronistic. By and large, Roman-period readers appear to have been interested not in the day-to-day and sometimes hand-to-mouth existence of the

residents of the province of Aegyptus, but in an Egyptian past and people that were mythic. Thus, one searches in vain for a single coherent Roman image of Egypt, or even a core set of preconceptions. There were many – often contradictory – stock generalizations in currency about Egyptians, their land, and their culture. Egyptians were cast as uncouth: soft, slave-like, violent, animal-worshippers.¹¹ Yet at the same time, other Roman-period authors showed profound respect for Egyptian civilization.¹² Thus, it matters little whether we characterize Roman ideas about Egyptians as positive or negative. Either can be preconceived, oversimplified, or based on imagination. The expression of attitudes toward the Egyptian (as for any “other”) tells us more about the people forming, stating, and perpetuating the underlying stereotypes than about the putative subjects of those statements.

It is not my goal to provide a comprehensive summary of Roman attitudes to Egypt, whether attested by textual or artistic evidence. Sweeping characterizations of visual representations and texts are of limited utility. Viewing and reading were both creative acts of interpretation, and art and text often worked together to create rich, mutually informing dialogues. Though satisfactory answers to the simple questions with which we began are elusive, however, we can nevertheless investigate the purposes to which any given text or artwork put an image of Egypt, acknowledging both idiosyncrasy and authorial or artistic agenda. The better question is: how does a work situate itself relative to the discourse on Egypt, and how does it reinforce, challenge, or transform it? In this chapter, after a brief look at the most common visual representations of Egypt following annexation, I turn to the in-depth examination of two characterizations of its geography, one visual and one textual, each dating to the early second century CE: the Vatican Nile and Juvenal’s 15th Satire.

NILOTICA: THE LAND AND PEOPLE OF EGYPT IN ROMAN ART

A wealth of scholarship has investigated *nilotica*, a neologism used for visual representations of the river and the peoples living along its banks, in a wide range of media. They are most common in two genres: personifications sculpted in the round and two-dimensional landscapes in fresco and mosaic.¹³ Most attention has focused on the latter, and the *communis opinio* holds that such scenes exercised a wide appeal. Their lush landscapes spoke of agricultural abundance; the Nile shown in flood celebrated Egypt as the capital’s breadbasket. The antics and sexual exploits of the minute denizens of the Nile were humorous; the laughter they elicited could serve to ward off the evil eye.¹⁴ It should be stressed from the outset that neither landscapes nor personifications are representative, in any real sense, of Roman attitudes to Egypt or Egyptians. In different ways, they presented images of a faraway place

slanted to the expectations of viewers in the contexts in which they could be found. Landscape scenes predominate in the private sphere, sculptures in the public sphere. Both modes of representation predate the annexation of Egypt but found widest popularity in the centuries after.

Landscape scenes range in size. A few are large compositions that dominate the rooms in which they appear, as in the *praedia* of Julia Felix or the House of the Pygmies, or belong to compositions in which a series of scenes combine to create a narrative, as in the garden frieze from the House of Maius Castricius, the frieze from the portico of the Temple of Apollo, or the often-illustrated paintings from the House of the Doctor, famous for the caricature of the “Judgment of Solomon,” in which the biblical drama is played out by small Egyptian actors.¹⁵ [Figure 4.1, Plate VII] Often, however, nilotic landscapes are small in scale, secondary decorative elements within complicated mural schemes. They range from landscapes shown in removed birds’ eye perspective with lavish porticos and monuments lining the Nile’s shores, to scenes that zoom in to focus on the residents of these river-worlds. Even those representations of largest scale (and most implied narrative content) often present stories in which putative Egyptians are caught in the act: having sex, defecating, or fighting for their lives against crocodiles and hippopotami whose huge size relative to the minute residents of the Nile enhances their menace.

Miguel John Versluys has argued that representations of Egypt changed with the advent of Roman rule. Before conquest, nilotic landscapes are rare, and many extant examples do not include human actors. (The Nile Mosaic is the notable exception, discussed later in this chapter.) They feature the flora and fauna of Egypt, carefully rendered so as to be identifiable.¹⁶ In Versluys’ view, this shift was connected with colonization, driven by the desire to prove Rome’s superiority over the residents of the recently subjugated province.¹⁷ John Clarke, in turn, argues that these scenes negotiated deep-seated elite concerns about the integrity of the body and individual dignity. The compromising situations in which the residents of the Nile find themselves put these fears on show, while their humor provides relief, displacing these anxieties onto a strange and distant land.¹⁸ Yet, in most cases, the responses of viewers are hypothetical. The one nilotic painting inscribed with an actual viewer’s response is from the temple of Isis in Pompeii, where a visitor wrote free-hand on the surface of the fresco *veni hoc*, “I came here.”¹⁹ [Figure 4.2] While it is possible this simply records a visit to the sanctuary, it is also possible that it is a joke in response to the visual imagery. Given the explicit nature of many nilotic scenes (although, admittedly, not this one), it is further possible that this is sexual innuendo.²⁰ Alternately, it may evoke a popular phrase well attested in Pompeian graffiti, *veni hoc cupidus multo magis ire cupii*, “eagerly I came here, I desired much more to leave,” a light-hearted play upon the traveler’s lament.²¹ In either case, it offers confirmation that these scenes were



FIGURE 4.1. Painting from House of the Doctor (VII 5, 24, peristyle g) depicting the “Judgment of Solomon” (mid-to-late first century CE).

Photo credit: Scala / Art Resource, NY.

intended to amuse, and also a reminder of the importance of physical context to the interpretation of motif.

The majority of the material comes from the houses, baths, and temples of Pompeii, offering the opportunity to assess the appeal of the motif in a wide range of contexts.²² Even with such a rich corpus, however, generalizations can be misleading. Many homes are difficult to date with precision, and close attention to Pompeii’s post-earthquake chronology suggests that the greatest popularity of the motif did not *immediately* follow conquest but peaked decades later in the first century CE.²³ Beyond Pompeii, the sample is too small for statistical analysis that would relate changes in these modes of representation to historical events. Yet the broad popularity of representations of Egypt in the imperial period is nonetheless manifest. As Versluys and Whitehouse’s compendia illustrate, such scenes had an appeal throughout the empire for centuries, including in Aegyptus.²⁴

Although two-dimensional nilotic landscapes do appear in contexts beyond the private sphere, representations of geography in public contexts more often took the form of personifications. Representations of places or natural features of the landscape in human form were a common visual metaphor for



FIGURE 4.2. Pygmy landscape, sanctuary of Isis in Pompeii, with drawing showing location of graffito (c. 62–79 CE).

Drawing credit: Karen Rasmussen, Archeographics.

Photo credit: author, courtesy: Ministero per i Beni e la Attività Culturali – Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei.



FIGURE 4.3. Coin of Hadrian with personification of Egypt. Obverse legend: *Hadrianus Aug(ustus) co(n)s(ul) III p(ater) p(atriae)*. Reverse legend: *Aegyptos*. (134–38 CE).

Photo credit: © Trustees of the British Museum.

the relationship between the capital and its territories, from the Republican period onward. Pliny, for example, says that Pompey commissioned fourteen personifications of the regions and peoples he had defeated from an artist named Coponius, and these remained on view in his theater and porticus for centuries.²⁵ Suetonius mentions the same statues in a telling anecdote about a nightmare suffered by the emperor Nero, in which the personifications came to life and crowded so close around him that he could not move. Suetonius cleverly inverts the motif's symbolism to foreshadow the civic unrest that eventually brought Nero's reign to a bloody end, as the territories that supported the emperor turned against him.²⁶ As a motif, personifications were adaptable, subject to variation, and, in one recent theory, left open to multiple identifications by design.²⁷

Personifications of the province of Aegyptus were not common, however, attested solely in a programmatic coin series issued by the mint of Rome under Hadrian between 134 and 138 CE, which bore reverses featuring a number of provinces envisioned as women. [Figure 4.3] Egypt here is a recumbent woman accompanied by an ibis, leaning with her weight supported by a basket of fruit, or sometimes by a calyx krater, perhaps referencing Maereotic wine.²⁸ It is a neat encapsulation of the tropes of Egypt's abundance and its exotic fauna. While there are no known versions of personified Egypt in the round, the coin type bears some relation to a common Alexandrian reverse type issued under both Trajan and Hadrian labeled Euthenia, the personification of the province's abundance and agricultural yield.²⁹ In Rome and elsewhere, however, the Nile was the defining feature of the province. As a metaphor, whether in art or literature, rivers were potent symbols, drawing on widespread ideas about the relationship between geography and culture; rivers delineated borders, facilitated transport and trade, and were deemed sacred



FIGURE 4.4. Sculpture of the personified Nile, Piazza del Campidoglio, Rome (Hadrianic or Severan).

Photo credit: author.

throughout the Mediterranean world.³⁰ More than twenty extant personified Niles are known, considered by Sylvia Klementa to be *freie Schöpfungen*, free creations after a shared prototype, with great variation in the details.³¹

The Nile is generally depicted as a bearded deity reclining, supported by an animal symbolic of Egypt (a crocodile, hippopotamus, or sphinx), holding a cornucopia. [Figure 4.4] He is often accompanied by child-like *pecheis*, a term roughly indicating the distance from a man's elbow to the tip of his middle finger. The origin of the type is much debated. Scholars have postulated that it was an artwork commissioned by the Ptolemaic court or a dedication made by Vespasian in the Templum Pacis after the conquest of Judea.³² Seeking the source of the type, however, is not a particularly productive line of inquiry. The prototype may have originated in Egypt, as has long been asserted, but the motif is little attested before the late first century BCE. While we do not know with certainty when (or where) the type was invented, what is clear is that a taste for such artworks developed in the Roman period and that they were adapted to display in a variety of contexts, often associated with imperial patronage.³³ The type appealed outside of Rome as well, even known in rare examples from Egypt.³⁴ As with other personifications, the type was adaptable to a range of circumstances and purposes. A rare inscribed Trajanic Nile was found in Roman Spain near the town of Igabrum, modern Cabra. [Figure 4.5] From an iconographic standpoint, it is unremarkable, yet its inscription provides both a secure date and a sense of its role within a broader decorative program. The inscription records that it was a gift from an individual to a



FIGURE 4.5. Sculpture of the personified Nile, Igabrum (Flavian).

Photo credit: Archivo Fotográfico del Museo Arqueológico de Córdoba.

local collegium of bakers or wheat-sellers, making explicit the connection between the Nile and the *annona* in a context far from Egypt and Rome.³⁵

If there is a single change in representations of Egypt following annexation, it is that all manner of artworks purporting to describe this far-off place – both sculptures in the round and landscapes in two-dimensional media – became increasingly common. Pre-conquest representations relied on no presupposed knowledge on the part of their viewers about Egypt other than the ability to recognize certain exotic plants and animals, such as the crocodile or hippopotamus. In contrast, post-annexation scenes of pygmies on the Nile encapsulate “facts” about Egypt and its denizens presumed to be common knowledge. The attitudes underlying the tastes for these images are difficult to isolate, and reflect as many positive associations as negative. Viewed outside a specific context, it is difficult to determine what beliefs animated any given example. Considered in context, these works can shift our perspective in surprising ways.

Let us take, as an extended example, the Nile Mosaic, considered both as locus classicus of the genre and as one component of a grand and coordinated architectural display. The mosaic as it is seen today is a pastiche of sorts, heavily repaired and reconstructed from fragments that preserve perhaps half of the original of the pavement. [Plate VIII] Much about this work – including the arrangement of the scenes and even the text of many of the labels – remains speculative. As the fragments are reconstructed by Helen Whitehouse and P. G. P. Meyboom, the mosaic depicts a panorama of the course of the Nile, unfurling in curves from its source in the mountains to its terminus in the Delta. In navigating its flooded waters, an ancient viewer toured the region, and was presented with vignettes illustrating Egyptian life and customs. Read from the top (though it could as easily be read from the bottom), the mosaic follows the Nile through lands populated by Ethiopian

hunters and exotic animals, labeled in Greek. It traces the course of the Nile through Middle Egypt, past monumental architectural complexes and people engaged in ritual. The river terminates in the marshy Delta, whose more cosmopolitan inhabitants dine in elegant settings. The mosaic is rich with details that suggest that its designers were familiar with Greek and Roman Egypt: the residents depicted include native Egyptians in priestly garb as well as soldiers in Graeco-Roman military dress. The scenes have been read to depict historical events in the reign of King Ptolemy II (283–246 BCE), on one view representing an envoy to Ethiopia and on another view read as a celebration of his famed coronation ceremony in Alexandria. An influential recent treatment argues that the work reflects Egyptian religion, suggesting that many of its scenes depict the Khoiak festival of Osiris. Other contemporary work compellingly explores its relationship with literary genres, particularly *geographia*.³⁶

The Nile Mosaic takes pride of place in discussions of *nilotica* because of its sheer size, unparalleled creative vision, quality of workmanship, and lengthy post-antique history. Among the first scholars to treat the piece was Prince Federico Cesi, one of the founding members of the Accademia dei Lincei. He proclaimed that it was the very mosaic described by Pliny the Elder as having been placed in the Sanctuary of Fortuna by Sulla.³⁷ Although this view has long been dispelled, dating the mosaic remains vexed. Suggestions have ranged from the generally accepted late second century BCE (120–110 BCE) to the Augustan period to the reign of Hadrian. Arguments depend almost entirely on subjective criteria, including matters of style, and the mosaic's putative relationship with its lost source material, hinging especially on the Nile Mosaic's relationship with a single comparative example, the painted frieze from a Hellenistic tomb in Maresha.³⁸ This evidence is open to interpretation. The Maresha paintings depict more than twenty animals in a frieze with hunters and trumpeters. Many of the figures are labeled in Greek. On one view, the similarities in the kinds of animals included in both the Nile Mosaic and the Maresha frieze suggest that they drew upon the same source material, perhaps an illustrated manuscript, something akin to the much later *Physiologus*. On another view, the differences in orthography in the labels (e.g., the label for the imaginary "onocentauros" on the Nile Mosaic, in which the definite article was attracted into the word) suggest that the Nile Mosaic drew on a related but distinct textual tradition.³⁹ For present purposes, we may set aside specific arguments over its date or the source of its iconography. What most scholarly discussions share is a focus *internal* to the mosaic, treating it akin to a painting hung on the wall, as the mosaic is presented to the public in its museum setting today.

That is not how an ancient viewer would have encountered the mosaic. Recent work on mosaics stresses the importance of their physical location in lived environments, arguing that viewers considered them while moving across their surfaces rather than from a single point of static remove.⁴⁰ Thus,

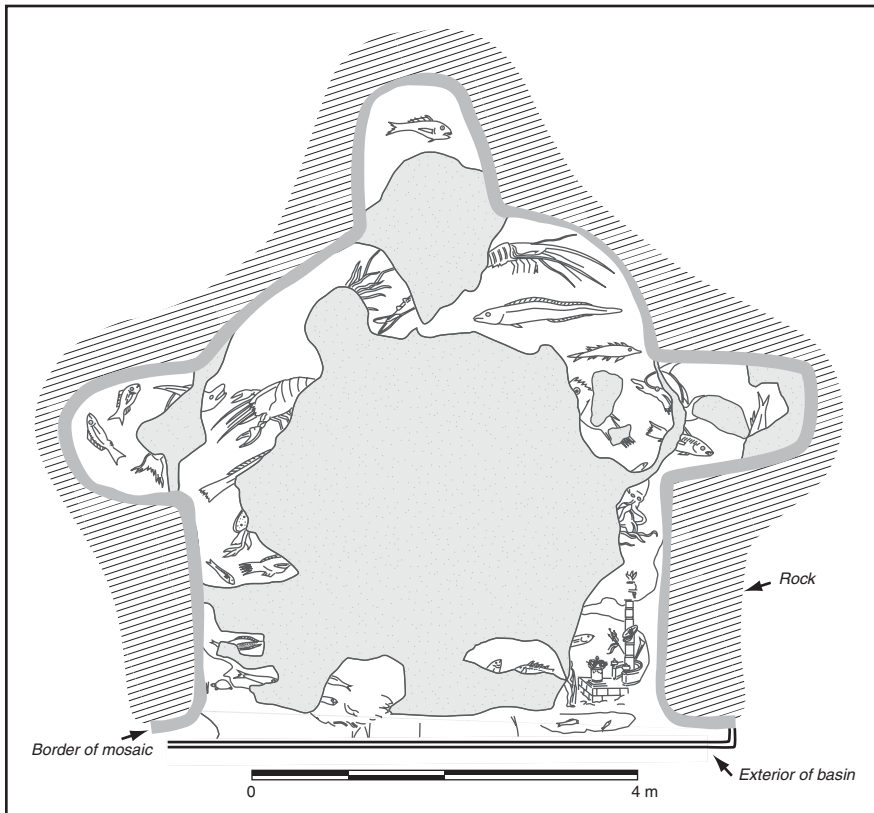


FIGURE 4.6. Line drawing, Fish Mosaic of Praeneste (110–20 BCE).

Drawing credit: Karen Rasmussen, Archeographics (modified from Gullini 1956, Tav. 11).

we should think not simply of how the Nile encapsulates and describes the geography of Egypt, but how it functioned in its setting in the town center of Praeneste and encouraged polysemous readings with a nearby mosaic, presented to viewers in much the same way, the Fish Mosaic. [Figure 4.6] Because the Fish Mosaic is still in situ, it allows us to take better stock of the physical situation of both artworks. Both mosaics formed the pavements of recessed apses opening to either side of a columned, basilica-like hall. [Figure 4.7] The space is little understood: some see it as part of the sanctuary of Fortuna, others as a civic space linked to the forum, still others as an Iseum.⁴¹ The apse in which the Fish Mosaic was located was a natural cave with three irregular niche-like projections, the floor set into a low basin with masonry lip. That in which the Nile Mosaic was located was an artificial cave, hewn from the living rock with three regular, well-articulated niches; it, too, may have been set in a similar low basin. Although its removal renders the setting speculative pending future investigation of the substrata, a recent restoration project of the Antro degli Sorti, of which the Fish Mosaic was the pavement, for example, found new evidence arguing for an early date for the work (110–120 CE)

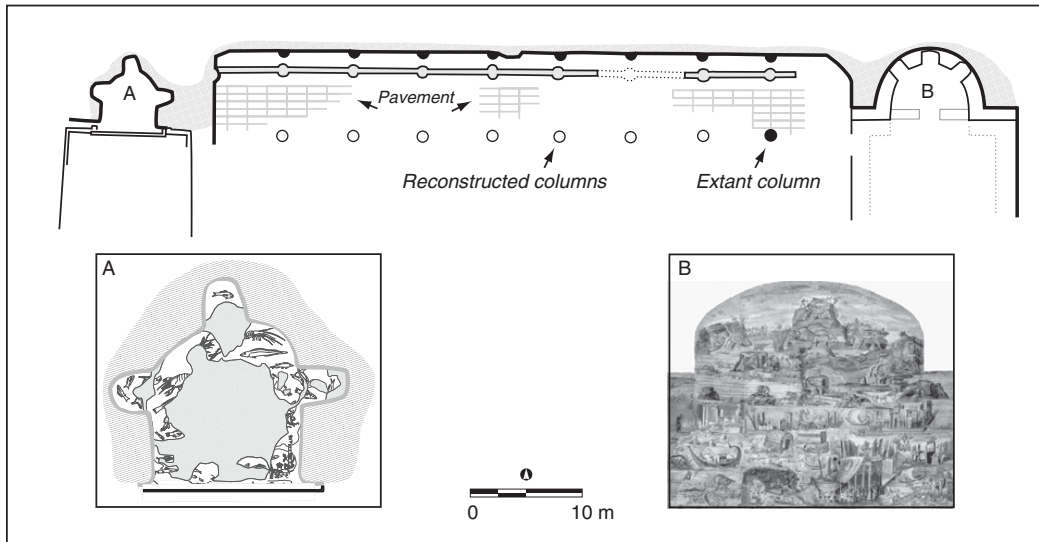


FIGURE 4.7. Plan of basilica, Praeneste, with location of the Nile Mosaic and Fish Mosaic in the “Antro degli Sorti.”

Drawing credit: Karen Rasmussen, Archeographics (adapted from Whitehouse 1976, Fig. A, and Gatti 2004, Fig. 12; thumbnails of Plate VIII and Fig. 4.6).

on the basis of pottery fragments in strata beneath the bed of the mosaic.⁴² If the two mosaics are taken to be contemporaneous, this provides some confirmation for the traditional date for the Nile Mosaic.⁴³ More to the point, the improved plan of the structure proves that both mosaics were on display as part of the same architectural complex. Even if the wings in which they were situated served different functions, their display was coordinated to a significant degree, and their subjects, though different, were mutually informing for much of the period of their ancient display. Like the Nile Mosaic, the Fish Mosaic also presents a waterscape, a portrait of the Mediterranean Sea filled with all manner of marine life – octopi, squid, and many varieties of fish and shellfish – with a rocky shoreline running around the perimeter.⁴⁴ Here, too, the mosaic presents vignettes of activity, as some fish hunt others, and men lie in wait for the fish, standing on rocky coastlines. The scale of the animals differs, so that those close to the lip of the cave are smaller than those in the center, now lost, and rear. In the foreground, a human figure emerges near a sanctuary on the shore.⁴⁵

The setting of both mosaics certainly influenced viewers’ experiences and interpretations. The installation of the Nile and Fish Mosaics in the niche and natural cave, respectively, created atmospheres that enhanced their watery subjects. If the surfaces of the mosaics were covered in even a thin sheen of water, as suggested by the Fish Mosaic’s recessed basin, the colors of the tesserae would be more vibrant and the mosaic surfaces slightly reflective.

Further, the settings of each required the viewer to adopt a specific vantage point at the lower border, allowing the eye to move back into a space that was increasingly dark (and in which cooler air may have circulated and any sounds been amplified). When considered as pendants thus set in conversation, the narrative thrust of each mosaic becomes clearer.

The Nile Mosaic presents a teleological journey. Following the eye of a viewer standing at the river's mouth, the narrative unfolds linearly, as the eye crosses the mosaic left-to-right and right-to-left all the way to the apex. In contrast, the Fish Mosaic presents a cyclical scene, as rocky coasts at the edges of the mosaic bound an abundant sea. Both mosaics express an interest in the relationship between an environment and its inhabitants, human and animal.⁴⁶ Both, too, play with perspective and the faculty of sight, illuminating what cannot otherwise be seen. The Nile Mosaic leads the viewer's eye across distance to the far reaches of the world. The Fish Mosaic transports the eye downward, revealing the unseen world of the ocean. In other words, each engaged the viewer by offering competing conceptions of time and space, the Nile's linear flow counterpoised with the ocean's eternal cycle. Despite its canonical status as an exemplar of a broader category of material, the Nile Mosaic derives much of its aesthetic value and artistic effect from its specific context: its (potential) associations with local religious practices, modes of scientific thought, and its physical and artistic setting.

This example reminds us that representations of Egypt in the visual arts did not exist in a vacuum. While categorization by genre can be useful, it risks simplifying the appeal of the admittedly varied artworks we call *nilotica*, seeing them as too transparently representing the place of Egypt. Context enriches our understanding; representations of Egypt were rarely if ever intended to be considered in isolation. The Nile and Tiber from Hadrian's Villa, for instance, were included in a gallery along the *euripus* leading to the domed triclinium, which included also a range of famous works of diverse theme – from replicas of the caryatids from the Erechtheum and Forum of Augustus, to Sileni, to Ephesian Amazons of the so-called Sciarra, Mattei, and Sciarpa types.⁴⁷

As I explore in greater detail later in this chapter, both visual and textual descriptions of Egypt asked readers or viewers to engage in complicated acts of interpretation. To each, the viewer or reader brought a store of knowledge that shaped his or her perceptions; in turn, the objects of scrutiny worked with or cut against what is “known,” and often to a purpose. In what follows, I offer a contextual reading of the Vatican Nile and its Tiber, informed by *ekphrases* of fictive artworks from the Second Sophistic. Then, I examine Juvenal's 15th Satire through the lens of maps and other visual representations of Egypt's geography. When we look at art and text together as mutual participants in a rich dialectic, then, we confront the Roman discourse on Egypt in action.



FIGURE 4.8. Front view of the Vatican Nile, associated with the Iseum and Serapeum Campense (Trajanic or Hadrianic).

Photo credit: Schwanke: Neg. D-DAI-Rom 81.2187.

EGYPT IN THE EMPIRE: THE VATICAN NILE AND LOUVRE TIBER

In 1513, excavations in the region of San Stefano del Cacco on the Via di Piedi Marmo in Rome recovered a monumental marble sculpture of the personified Nile, more than 2 meters high and 3 meters long.⁴⁸ [Figure 4.8] In its current reconstruction, the Vatican Nile is surrounded by sixteen children or *pecheis*⁴⁹ at play, though some of these figures are restored from remains as minimal as a few fingers or toes. Its base, nearly a foot tall, was carved with scenes of Egyptian animals and pygmies boating on the Nile. A personified Tiber had been found in the same location a year earlier. [Figure 4.9] Also much restored, the Tiber holds a cornucopia in his right hand and leans on a wolf suckling Romulus and Remus; its base included a myth-historical scene of Aeneas and vignettes of men at work on the river's banks.⁵⁰

Since their exhumation, these two works have been considered masterpieces, and they share an involved post-antique history. Long in the collections of the Vatican, they were seized by Napoleon in 1797 and taken to Paris; in 1815, the Nile was returned to the Vatican as part of the “fifty-percent solution” negotiated by Antonio Canova, while the Tiber remained in the Louvre.⁵¹ Although divorced today, they were pendants in antiquity, a particularly fine example of a pairing known from many other public and imperial contexts.⁵² In Roman art, pendants encouraged active modes of viewing, inviting reflection on theme and scrutiny of form.⁵³ In this case, formal composition certainly heightened the thematic contrast. The rivers are identical in size and pose; each glances over his shoulder, presumably to meet the other's gaze. Against this unified canvas, those details that differentiate the rivers receive particular emphasis: the sphinx of Egypt meets the eye along with the wolf



FIGURE 4.9. Front view of the Louvre Tiber, associated with the Iseum and Serapaeum Campense (Trajanic or Hadrianic).

Photo credit: © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY.

of Rome; the child-like *pecheis* are juxtaposed with the just-born Romulus and Remus.

I favor a date for these works in the early second century CE, during the reign of Trajan or Hadrian – consistent with the broad taste for the type.⁵⁴ Because of their findspot, the Vatican Nile and Louvre Tiber can be confidently associated with the sanctuary to Isis and Serapis in the Campus Martius, though we have little other solid information regarding their display. The plan of the Iseum and Serapaeum is known primarily from the Severan marble plan of Rome (fragment 35uv), which suggest a vast space roughly 70 meters wide and nearly 200 meters long, laid out on a north-south axis with an east-west transept and apse beyond, articulated by niches for the display of statues.⁵⁵ [Figure 4.10] The apse is sometimes reconstructed as an immense basin, and the fact that a number of works of aquatic theme are associated with the site – including the Nile, Tiber, and other personifications – argues for some kind of water feature or fountain.⁵⁶ The nature of their arrangement necessarily, however, remains conjectural. The line articulating this space on the Severan plan could equally represent the division between a roofed and open exterior space as it could a water feature. And, while the bases of both sculptures exhibit signs of erosion by water, the fact that they were used as fountains in the statue court of the Vatican's Belvedere gardens from 1524 complicates any conclusions drawn from this condition.⁵⁷ Both are fully realized in the round and lack fittings, which may suggest that they were not originally displayed as part of a fountain.

Although we cannot stipulate the precise manner of their display, the association of the sculptures with the Iseum tells us much about their ancient

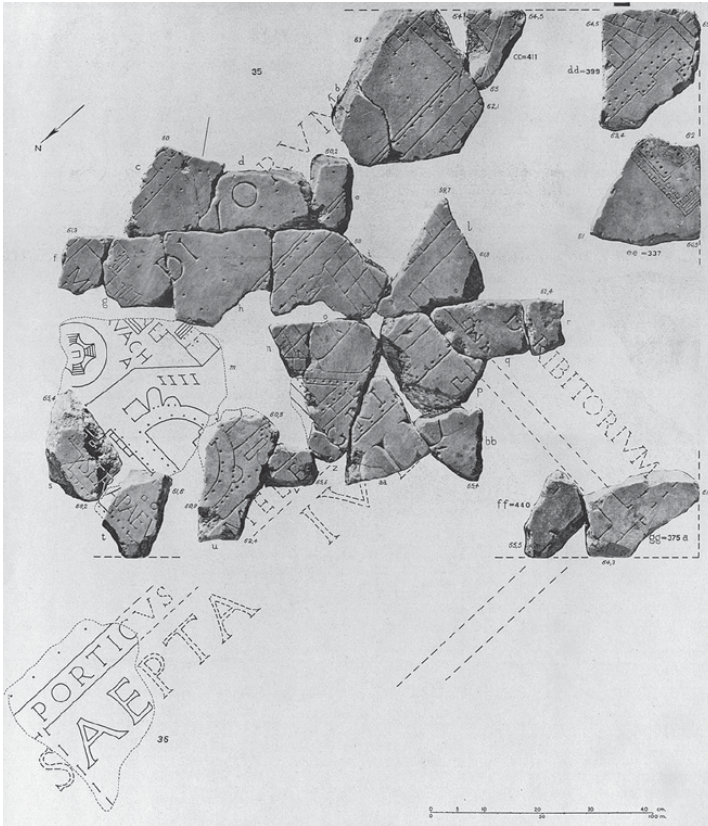


FIGURE 4.10. Remains of Forma Urbis Romae, depicting the region of the sanctuary to the Egyptian gods (Severan).

Photo credit: Archivio Fotografico dei Musei Capitolini.

audiences, initiates in the cult of Isis and members of the public at large. The Iseum and Serapaeum opened directly off the Saepta, with which the structure shared a party wall; the east-west transept, indeed, may have acted as an open thoroughfare through and between public monuments in this densely populated zone of the city. In the imperial period, the Saepta was a good place to spend a leisured hour, known as a venue for the display of artworks and a pleasure garden.⁵⁸ Thus, the Vatican Nile and its Tiber would almost certainly have been seen by a range of Roman viewers in a context known for its artistic displays and enjoying, at various times, imperial patronage.⁵⁹

Ekphrases of fictive Niles in Second Sophistic literature give us some purchase on how these audiences would have approached these two works. In a commentary on an imaginary painting entitled *The Pecheis*, Philostratus provides the following vivid description of a personified Nile:

The *pecheis*, children exactly proportionate to their name, are playing around the Nile, and the Nile rejoices in them, especially because they proclaim him

and how much he is poured forth for the Egyptians. And so they draw near him; they come to him out of the water as newborns, gentle and smiling, and I suppose that they themselves take part in the act of babbling. And some of them sit upon his shoulders, others hang from the locks of his hair, others sleep upon his bent arm, and still others celebrate a *komos* upon his chest. And he gives flowers to them, some from his lap, others from the crook of his arm, so that they might weave crowns of them [to wear], and that they, thus sanctified and made fragrant, might sleep upon the flowers. And the children ascend, one after the other, together with their *sistra*; for these things provide the sound of the Nile [literally, “the ringing for that water”]. Crocodiles, and also hippopotami, whom some depict together with the Nile, at this time lie away in the deep, whirling water, lest alarm fall upon the children. Signs of farming and navigation make clear it is the Nile, my child, for this very reason: the Nile, making Egypt fit for navigation, when drunk up by the plains gives the ability to work the fertile land, and in Ethiopia, whence he comes, a god is set up as his dispenser, from whom he is sent out in right measure with the seasons. He is depicted to be perceived as high as heaven, and he places his foot upon the watery sources, leaning forward just as does Poseidon. The river looks to him, and asks that his newborns be numerous.⁶⁰

Although this passage has often been discussed in relation to extant works of art – even, in one case, taken literally, as a description of the Vatican Nile itself⁶¹ – it does not describe an actual work; it may even deliberately move between different artistic conventions for depicting the Nile.⁶² Indeed, Philostratus openly acknowledges that there was variance in iconography. That some artists choose to include exotic animals with their Niles implies that others do not. Nevertheless the subject was widely intelligible. His narrator moves from exposition of what he sees to a commentary on what he casts as the customs of *real* people living in Egypt. His Egypt is an agricultural society where people cultivate the fields made fertile by the Nile’s flood and, he implies, venerate the river as a god. In this explication, Philostratus reveals his own knowledge about the putative source of the Nile, a question much debated in antiquity.⁶³

Lucian’s description of an imaginary painting of the Nile also assumes that a well-educated reader could immediately call iconographic elements to mind: “I wish to illustrate for you, as if Cebes, both ways [to Rhetoric], drawing pictures in words. . . . If you have ever seen the Nile, recorded in a painting, himself lying upon some kind of crocodile or hippopotamus, as are frequent within his water, with small children playing beside him – the Egyptians call them *pecheis* – just like these also are the Compliments and Rhetoric.”⁶⁴ Like Philostratus, Lucian plays up the range of variation among artworks representing the Nile. For his purposes, it matters little whether the Nile is depicted with a hippopotamus or a crocodile; it is the reader’s ability to manipulate the

mental image that is crucial. Lucian assumes that his readers will associate the personified cubits with the flood of the Nile and the abundance it generates; their number and potency derive from the Nile itself. Relying on this assumption, he creates a comic image of a torrent of Compliments streaming from the flow of Rhetoric. In comparing himself to Cebes, Lucian places extra emphasis on the rhetorical device of *ekphrasis*; Cebes was a figure well known in antiquity as an interlocutor in Plato's dialogues, and a lengthy work describing a single painting was published under his name in the first century CE.⁶⁵ Although his aim is not to display his erudition, nonetheless Lucian exhibits a sense (implicitly shared with his reader) that knowledge of geography and customs are important facets of education. He first mentions the *pecheis* as "children at play," foregrounding what they *look* like, before asserting that "the Egyptians call them *pecheis*." He thus displays an understanding of the iconography, and then shows his awareness of the people and customs of Egypt.

Even Pliny's description of a real Nile in the Templum Pacis reveals interpretative play:

The Egyptian people, too, discovered in Ethiopia [a stone] which they call *basanites*, of both the color and hardness of iron, whence also one gives the name to it. None larger has ever been found than that in the Templum Pacis, dedicated by the emperor Vespasian in the motif of the Nile, with sixteen children playing around him, through which are understood the same number of cubits of the highest measure of the river, flooding itself.⁶⁶

There can be little doubt that Pliny is describing a work he saw with his own eyes, dedicated to Pax in the magnificent precinct Vespasian built and filled with treasures reclaimed from Nero and from his own triumphs.⁶⁷ Pliny's own interest, of course, is in the material: *basanites*, a black Egyptian granite or basalt, which is included in his extended discussion of stones from Egypt.⁶⁸ Yet he also embeds within his description a reading of the motif – as representing the river in flood – which is based on additional knowledge of the river, the geography of Egypt, and its natural resources.⁶⁹ That is not to say that Pliny's understanding of the meaning of the iconography is an elusive one; to the contrary, Pliny presents what he sees as an authoritative reading. The point is that his language, like that of Philostratus and Lucian, stresses an interpretative process appropriate to the object of his discussion: his description is of the large block of stone sculpted in a motif, *argumentum*, that may be interpreted.

Literary sources describing personified Niles highlight a series of points about the ancient Roman reception of personifications of the Nile. First, as almost goes without saying, those who came in contact with such artworks in the first centuries CE did not primarily understand them as the reflection of Ptolemaic masterworks; the origin of the iconography was of little concern



FIGURE 4.11. Rear view of the Vatican Nile, with scenes of pygmies boating on the Nile on the base (Trajanic or Hadrianic).

Photo credit: Schwanke: Neg. D-DAI-Rom 81.2188.

to most Roman audiences. Rather, Niles invited allegorical interpretation on many levels, as a metaphor for the control of far-away lands, emblem of abundance and plenty, or trope for the act of allegorical and rhetorical interpretation itself. Second, these ancient responses are overwhelmingly positive, casting the Nile as a metonym for the abundance of Egypt, a natural bounty that supported the peoples of Egypt and Rome. Vespasian's Nile, set among reclaimed imperial treasures and foreign spolia, served as a reminder that the benefits of peace were not merely aesthetic, but also tangible, in the form of grain, produced by the flood of the Nile for Roman stomachs in the capital and throughout the empire.

Let us now return to the specific examples of the Vatican Nile and its pendant, the bases of which project a loose narrative upon the type-as-template. On the Nile, the connection between the personified river and sculpted base is negotiated deftly. The front face of the base depicts flowing water, which stems from the tip of the Nile's cornucopia and pours over a rocky riverbed. The second side presents hippopotami and crocodiles within a marshy background, some in open confrontation. These scenes continue to the rear with the addition of pygmies, naked and largely defenseless. [Figure 4.11] Two groups in boats find themselves set upon by crocodiles and hippopotami. Their plight is, on some level, humorous, as one, peering out of the prow of the boat to look for signs of danger, exposes his rear end in the process. His companion, attempting to fend off a crocodile with nothing but an oar, seems on the verge of unwittingly sodomizing him with its handle. The last side of the base, beneath the sphinx, presents a simpler scene. A crocodile and two bulls move forward in almost rhythmic procession toward a lotus plant,

which melds seamlessly with the lotus plants on the front side of the plinth to mark the start of the flood.

On the Tiber, as on the Nile, nearly the entire front face of the base is devoted to the representation of flowing water, save for a small building that appears to the far right below the Tiber's foot. From this point, the base presents three relief scenes: first a myth-historical episode set along the banks of the Tiber; next, a scene of men navigating the river; and finally, animals grazing along the river's banks. Along the right side of the base, the scene begins with a line of four buildings, while a solitary figure sits upon a rock and looks to the right; a massive pig stands in front of two of the buildings. In the far distance, facing the seated figure, two bearded deities rear out of the water, arms wide, with water flowing under and around them. The scene concludes, at the corner of the base, with two throned figures looking back toward the rest of the scene. [Figure 4.12] On the rear face, a man with a pole steers a barge laden with a box or block while three others guide it using a rope. [Figure 4.13] Two more men steer a second pole barge, and, where the water appears to meet the land, other men unload cargo. On the final side of the Tiber's base, underneath the wolf above, three animals graze at pasture.⁷⁰

The layout of the bases argues for an interactive mode of viewing, directing the viewer around the Nile in a clockwise direction and around the Tiber counterclockwise. A viewer could begin investigation of the pair at almost any point, through contemplation of equivalent features. Just as the scenes of daily life occupy equivalent places in the formal compositions of the works, so too animals of Egypt in procession occupy an equivalent place on the Nile's base to the flock of Italy's native animals on the Tiber's base. Neither work takes precedent over or is subordinate to the other, and the program can be read east-to-west or west-to-east. The meaning of the pairing would vary depending on the viewer's position and what questions the scene prompted. A viewer might stop to wonder which of the two was more famous, a question of concern to Pliny and others interested in geography.⁷¹ As the *ekphrases* discussed earlier demonstrate, viewers could also think about the culture and lifestyles of those people living in the region. While the limited scholarly explorations of the pairing focus on the literal, seeing the rivers as standing primarily for the navigation and trade between the empire's two largest ports in a flow of resources from east to west or as a statement of Roman hegemony, consideration of the two sculptures' bases in dialogue reveals a deeper semantic play. Odd though the pairing of scenes recounting Rome's founding with those showing pygmies beset by ravenous animals might at first appear, both invited viewers to think about the relationship between the mythic past and the present day.

Ideas about pygmies were long-standing in antiquity. Minute peoples living at the edge of the world appear as early as the *Iliad*, in which cranes stalk pygmies living along the river *Oceanus*. Homer's image pursues familiar birds

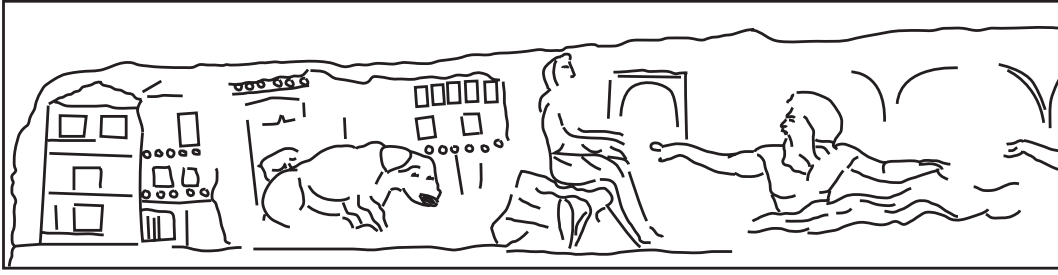


FIGURE 4.12. Line drawing of the base of the Louvre Tiber, scene with a cityscape, sow, Aeneas, river gods, and penates(?). Blank spaces represent areas of damage (Trajanic or Hadrianic).

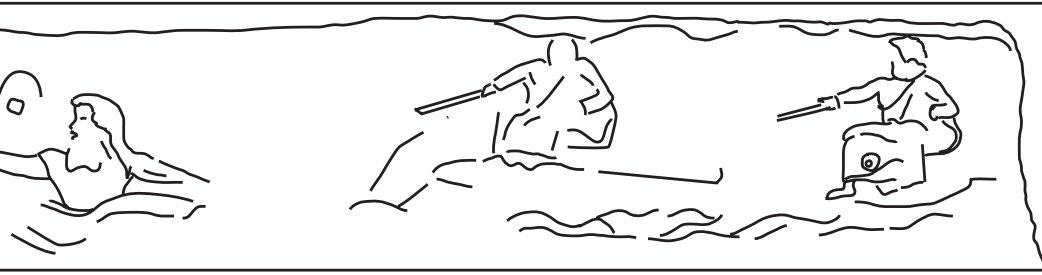
Drawing credit: Karen Rasmussen, Archeographics.



FIGURE 4.13. Base of Louvre Tiber, detail of back view: men in boats on the Tiber (Trajanic or Hadrianic).

Photo credit: © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY.

on their winter migrations into lands so conceptually distant that the natural order and food chain are reversed. His metaphor takes its power from the exigencies that motivate both sides, leading to an epic battle in miniature, with the cranes driven by relentless winter storms and the pygmies fighting for their very lives.⁷² Even after the Roman conquest of Egypt, the association of pygmies with the geographical region around the Nile was not absolute. Roman authors imagined small peoples living beyond the other edges of the known world, North, South, East and West: in far away India, along the shores of the Black Sea, and even in the icy-fogged Thule, believed to exist in the far north of the Western Roman provinces.⁷³ Pliny locates tribes of pygmies in no



fewer than three locations, suggesting that he at least was open to the possibility that pygmies lived in many different parts of the world at the same time.⁷⁴ Thus, it is wrong to assume that most Romans (even, or especially, those who commissioned artworks depicting pygmies) believed that they really inhabited Egypt, understood as the Roman province of Aegyptus. Roman beliefs in and about pygmies were as much broadly held ideas about the unknown as they were ideas about actual people who lived along the banks of the Nile.

There were almost certainly many people living in the heart of the empire who understood that pygmies were a convenient, and pleasing, fiction. Strabo's geography of Egypt, written in the first century CE, culminates with a discussion of the people living just beyond the Egyptian borders:

As is said, the outermost parts of the *oikoumene*, the places lying beyond it, poorly situated and uninhabitable whether on account of extreme heat or bitter cold, are necessarily worse off and disadvantaged in comparison to the temperate part. This is clear from the modes of life there and the dearth of human necessities. And indeed in many respects those people live poorly, both naked and nomadic; their livestock is small in size – sheep, goats, and cattle, and their dogs are small, too, both savage and fierce. Perhaps indeed people form guesses about and even invent the Pygmies from the small stature of these animals; *for indeed no one among men worthy of belief relates himself as having seen them.*⁷⁵

Strabo acknowledges how unlikely and unscientific broadly held ideas about the small peoples living along the Nile were. Implicit in his emphatic statement that no one worthy of belief pays these stories much heed is the suggestion that such stories nevertheless proliferated. In his attempt to find some rational explanation for these widespread beliefs – which is an extrapolation, he hypothesizes, from the small size of Egyptian under-nourished livestock – Strabo provides a key to understanding the appeal of the pygmies, both as a geographical metaphor and as a subject for artistic depiction. The land in which the pygmies are thought to live is a place increasingly known to those outside of Egypt through travel or accounts such as Strabo's own *Geography*. Many living in the capital would have a basic familiarity, too, with Egyptian animals, whether from staged displays such as Augustus put on in the city

or from the arena. What is imagined are the people who inhabit the distant Egyptian landscape – their appearance and their culture.

The scenes on the base of the Tiber also explored the relationship between geography, culture, and time. Of the reliefs, that depicting Rome's early history has attracted the most scholarly attention. In the view of Joël Le Gall, it depicts the arrival of Aeneas in Italy: the buildings represent either Lavinium, Ostia, or Alba Longa; the animal before them is the sow prophesized by the Tiber himself, marking the location where Aeneas should found his new city; the man seated upon the rock is Aeneas; the two aquatic deities are the Tiber and the Numicus or Lacus Ostiensis; and the seated figures to the right are the Trojan penates.⁷⁶ In this interpretation, the scenes do not literally depict the arrival of Aeneas or the foundation of Rome but presage both: as Aeneas rests, confronted by the riparian landscape, the buildings behind him hint at the “new Troy” he will found. In Le Gall's view, it is paramount that the scene reflects a *pre*-Vergilian tradition of the Aeneas myth – a way of reconciling a narrative that does not cohere with the best-known textual telling of the story. Yet the Tiber and its reliefs need not embody a single mythic or artistic tradition to the exclusion of others any more than the Vatican Nile and its reliefs embody a single vision of Egypt. These legends were not codified but living, interacting, and often negotiated in written and visual media.⁷⁷ In his early second-century CE *Life of Romulus*, for example, Plutarch acknowledges numerous stories recounting Rome's founding, and also pays attention to the wide variance in the figures' genealogies.⁷⁸ The personification and landscape-scenes on the Louvre Tiber, in my view, deliberately present two different traditions leading to the foundation of the city of Rome, in which the river figures as setting and participant. The Tiber leans upon the wolf of Rome, which curls to suckle Romulus and Remus, contrasting with the scene of Aeneas below. In both stories, the river may be understood as in flood: in Vergil's *Aeneid*, for example, the Tiber promises to use his raised waters to ease Aeneas' path and thwart his enemies; in Livy's telling of the story of Romulus and Remus, the flooded Tiber plays a part in upsetting the plot to drown the twins, instead gently delivering them in their basket to the wolf.⁷⁹

There is also ample visual evidence for the currency and negotiation of these myths in public art; the Aeneas story as recounted on the base of the Tiber appears to echo a theme much in currency in the second century CE. Scenes of Aeneas as founder of the city occur in commemorative medallions issued under Hadrian and his successors, which set the massive pig and a common visual figure type for Aeneas (depicted as carrying his father on his shoulders) against a cityscape.⁸⁰ A second century marble relief from Rome provides an even better comparison, showing Aeneas and Ascanius' discovery of the sow and her piglets. In the background, to right and left, are the ships of the Trojans and Italian cityscapes, respectively. [Figure 4.14] Thus, the Louvre



FIGURE 4.14. Relief from Rome, showing Aeneas, Ascanius, and sow, with Trojans in a boat and a temple in the background (c. 140–50 CE).

Photo credit: © Trustees of the British Museum.

Tiber blends and unites myth-historical traditions of great interest to contemporary audiences into a single artwork.

Just as pointed is its negotiation of the city's identity, past and present. The scenes on the rear of the base drive the narrative forward in time, a portrait through action of local industry within the Campus Martius. Through the imperial period, this region of the city was vital to civic life and a show-ground for the emperor's patronage of the people; the Campus Martius was home to many of the city's most magnificent theaters, porticos, and temples, including the Iseum and Serapaeum. It was also fundamental to the city's economic infrastructure, the site of alluvial harbors and warehouses for foodstuffs, marbles, and other imported commodities. Both Trajan and Hadrian made the region a focus of urban renewal. Recent research shows that the foundations of the Pantheon date to Trajan's reign, subsequently completed by Hadrian.⁸¹ Although not one of his more glamorous public projects, Trajan also invested considerable energy into an effort to control the flow of the Tiber and regulate its commercial activity. He built up embankments in an attempt to contain flooding, and created a new board of officials for regulating construction and use of the river's banks. A series of cippi marked their jurisdiction, making clear the divide between public and private property on the river's banks, perhaps also echoed in the Roman numerals marking the river on the *Via Anicia* plan of Rome, a second-century representation of the city apparently used as a regulatory aid.⁸² The scenes of daily life on the Tiber therefore reflect a

reality to which any viewer of the sculpture could well attest. These scenes acknowledged the role of the anonymous everyman in delivering on the promises of legend. Yet they also asked their viewers to think creatively, to see proof of the past in the present-day city, in much the same way as they could visit two different structures thought to be the house of Romulus, one located on the Palatine and one on the Capitoline, or the putative ship of Aeneas on display in the nearby dockyards.⁸³

Considered in tandem, the Vatican Nile and Louvre Tiber offered their viewers the opportunity to consider the expanse of the empire and the culture of its peoples. The device of personification made vast geographical distance more readily comprehensible in human terms, inviting viewers to consider similarities and differences between Egypt and Italy structured around a series of dichotomies: near/far, urban/rural, civilized/wild, mythic/timeless, real/imaginary. The rivers were each endowed with generous, well-fed bodies that celebrated the simple fact of human control of the landscape, bringing crops and sustenance from the bare earth. Yet both, too, reflect an awareness of the necessarily close and at times antagonistic relationship between people and their natural environments. The same rivers that irrigate fields may surge in devastating flood or dwindle in drought. On both sculptures, too, animals serve as a motif that emphasizes the power of the natural world both to sustain and threaten humanity. On the Tiber, Aeneas' discovery of an extraordinary wild beast, the sow, signals the birth of a city where men will raise families, establish laws, and create an enduring civilization; that he sacrifices the animal symbolizes due respect for the gods. On the Nile, the pygmies meet wild crocodiles and become their prey; that Romans believed Egyptians venerated these same animals affirms the superiority of Rome, in which beasts are not mistaken for deities. Yet on the whole, both sculptures sanitized disruptive forces by emphasizing how the rivers' waters provide nourishment to the peoples who dwell along their banks. The contrast builds a narrative of sorts, not just acknowledging Rome's position at the center of an empire receiving goods from far and wide, but presenting the image of an outside world under control – both rivers providing sustenance to the people of Rome, servants of imperial commerce.

On the whole, the Vatican Nile projects positive “images of Egypt,” asking an active and erudite engagement from its viewers. We should keep in mind, too, that within the Iseum and Serapaeum Campense and for viewers initiated in the mysteries of Isis, the motif could be doubly resonant. The Nile's floodwaters were sacred, and Nile water (or symbolic Nile water) was used in rituals both in Egypt and in Italy. During the festival of the *navigium Isidis*, followers processed to local bodies of water to set sail effigies of boats, as if on the Nile in Egypt, to ensure a fortunate season.⁸⁴ As an embodiment of the goddess' homeland, the personified Nile stood as a literal source of personal and deeply felt religious conviction for this audience of the faithful.

Personified Niles in general expressed a view of Egypt that was deliberately abstract, requiring viewers to negotiate, and possibly challenge, a number of their own preconceptions of the place and its geography. I turn next to consider a roughly contemporary textual source that appears to be, in stark contrast, a vitriolic and negative commentary on Egypt. Yet in this case, too, our understanding of the “image of Egypt” at work deepens and alters when we take account of context, audience, and authorial agenda.

“BETWEEN NEIGHBORING OMBI AND
TENTURA”: THE GEOGRAPHY OF EGYPT IN
JUVENAL 15

Who does not know, Volusius of Bithynia, what kind of monstrosities Egypt, out of its mind, worships? One part adores the crocodile, another part trembles before the ibis, stuffed full with snakes. A golden effigy of a sacred long-tailed monkey shines, where magic chords ring from broken-in-half Memnon and where ancient Thebes lies ruined with its hundred gates. Here entire towns worship cats; there, fish of the river; here, the dog – no one [worships] Diana. It is a crime to break and violate the leek and the onion with a bite (o, holy people! for whom these gods rise up in their gardens). Every table abstains from wool-bearing animals. It is a crime there to cut the throat of the offspring of a goat, but it is permitted to consume human flesh as food.⁸⁵

So begins Juvenal’s 15th Satire (*Satura* XV, written c. 120–140 CE), which recounts a bloody feud between two towns in Egypt that Juvenal calls “Tentura” and “Ombi,” a disagreement over the nature of the gods that culminates in a heinous act of violence in which a man is torn to pieces by a mob and then eaten raw. Juvenal 15 occupies a critical place in the literary discourse on Egypt, for it is the only work intended for an Italian audience to take contemporary Egypt as its apparent subject. Yet it is not a straightforward narrative by any means. The taboo subjects of cannibalism, human sacrifice, and animal worship have long dominated scholarly discussion; the poem has been treated as a factual account of an historical event, spurring inquiry into how widely Egyptians *in fact* practiced human sacrifice.⁸⁶ Indeed, the poem was interpreted thus even in late antiquity, for ancient scholiasts assert that Juvenal witnessed the events firsthand and decided to write the piece because the political advancement of an Egyptian man living in Rome made him angry.⁸⁷ Recent scholarship, in contrast, adopts the view that the first-person speaker is a persona, and that the theme of cannibalism and exploration of the relationship between the human and the animal served a distinct satiric agenda. The word *satura* derived from an adjective meaning “stuffed,” playing on the notion that a dish of food could be made from diverse ingredients or filled to overflowing; the genre, replete with erudite literary

allusion, requires close inspection of diction and style from its readers.⁸⁸ Satire 15 examines the relationship between actual behavior and the ethics that should instruct and improve humankind; it questions the redemptive value of philosophy by investigating the basis of intolerance.⁸⁹ On a surface level, the narrator of the poem regales his audience with a graphic account of animalistic behavior and lambasts the Egyptians; on a deeper level, the poem satirizes the very willingness of its audience to suspend belief, and implicates all mankind in its critique. Yet the extent to which Juvenal situated his work within a broader literary and cultural discourse on Egypt has been largely overlooked.⁹⁰ Juvenal's supposed autopsy of Egypt is a device, and his Egypt is not a portrait of the real place but an amalgam of stereotypes drawing equally on literary and non-literary sources of information, including prose, poetry, travel itineraries, and visual material.

To understand the "image of Egypt" in Juvenal 15, we must first look briefly at the poem as a whole, following the work's interior argument to its (il)logical conclusion. [Appendix 4.1] The first lines paraphrase Cicero's *Tusculanae Disputationes*, "Who does not know of the custom of the Egyptians," and act as an enjoiner to the reading audience to follow along with a sharp eye out for literary allusion.⁹¹ The question presents itself as needing no answer: everyone knows that Egyptians worship animals. For Cicero, the rhetorical question opens an extended exploration of Roman values as contrasted with foreign beliefs. Juvenal adapts the language to embed a reference to his own literary genre in his description of the ibis gorged on snakes, here using *saturo* as a verb emphasizing consumption. His description of animal-deities as *portenta* subtly foreshadows the fact that all in this poem is not what it seems. While the word *portentum* transparently refers to an unnatural creature or prodigy, it can also indicate a fantastic story, even a conceit or false premise.⁹² The line has a dual meaning and can be read to suggest both that Egyptians worship unnatural gods and that Egypt breeds tall tales. It signals a theme that will carry throughout the poem, as Juvenal questions the veracity of narrators and the complicity of credulous readers.

Although the story of the dispute between Ombi and Tentura drives the narrative, it comprises only a third of the poem. The habits of *anthropophagi*, "man-eaters," is a topic, the speaker says, so distasteful that tragedians will not exploit it; when Odysseus attempted to tell a story about cannibalism he was treated as a liar.⁹³ From start to finish, the speaker tries to make a case for the superiority of civilized culture over the barbaric, the former epitomized by modern man informed by philosophy and the latter by the animal-worshipping Egyptian. The choice of cannibalism as an example through which to explore this theme was a device borrowed from declamation.⁹⁴ Indeed, Juvenal's speaker resorts often to the devices of the declaimer, calling on the external authority of philosophers like Cicero, Zeno, and Pythagoras. He even cribs from Valerius Maximus, who discussed the

case of a Spanish tribe that resorted to cannibalism when under military siege. Animals, Valerius Maximus says, will do anything to preserve their young, whereas the Calagurritani ate not just their neighbors but even their wives and children.⁹⁵ Juvenal's narrator discusses the same event, and notes that animals – even the most ferocious – will not harm their own kind, not boars, bears, lions, tigers, or serpents. “Today, there is greater communal harmony (*concordia*) among snakes.”⁹⁶

As Juvenal's narrator makes his case for the inferiority of the Egyptians, stage by stage, it falters. Toward the end of the poem, he states that the defining features of humanity are the ability to feel empathy for others, to recognize the divine, to live in communities, to practice the arts, and to make tools.⁹⁷ Yet, following his logic, the Egyptians act most civilized at the fever pitch of their fray, which begins as a fistfight and evolves into a war waged first with stones and then with man-made weapons. The dispute itself stems from differences over the nature of the gods, “because each place hates the gods of its neighbors, since it believes that the only gods which should be cultivated are those which it itself worships.”⁹⁸ What they cannot do is recognize as human anyone living beyond their own community; they treat the outsider as animal. In so doing they commit the ultimate act of barbarism, consuming human flesh, raw.⁹⁹ The poem ends with a question that returns to the themes sounded in the opening lines: “What, therefore, would Pythagoras say? To what place would he not flee, if he could see now these monstrosities, he who abstained from all animals as if they were human, and did not allow in his stomach any legume?”¹⁰⁰ But unlike the first question and allusion to Cicero that opens the poem (calling on knowledge deemed so commonplace it need not be questioned), the final question pushes the reader to uncover the internal paradox. Juvenal's contemporaries and later writers believed that Pythagoras avoided meat because of his doctrine of metempsychosis, the transmigration of the soul into an animal body after death, and also because sparing pain led to human moral excellence.¹⁰¹ But, Juvenal says, there is no place on earth where Pythagoras can go to avoid human beings engaged in inhuman acts. There is a decided circularity here, for many traditions cast Egypt as the source of Pythagoras' wisdom.¹⁰² Nor can the speaker's exaggerated portrait of Pythagoras as a paragon of virtue, eschewing both meat and legumes, hold up to scrutiny. Lentils, chickpeas, and other pulses were crucial to ancient diets, while meat was eaten rarely, except in the most elite households. Much meat, furthermore, was the byproduct of sacrifice.¹⁰³ The diet that Pythagoras advocates would result in extreme deprivation and, indeed, would lead those who followed it to reject the shared worship of the gods, so critical to the definition of civilization the narrator offers. If one recalls the context of the quotation borrowed from Cicero, the irony in the final rhetorical question grows greater still. For Cicero set up the point that the Egyptians exemplified moral behavior in their adherence to their belief systems: everyone knows

that the Egyptians worship animals, to be sure, but the Egyptians will endure any punishment in the service of their gods, even the death penalty. Cicero's word is *carnificina*, which reduces the body to meat.¹⁰⁴ In Cicero's example, in other words, the principled pursuit of the kind of moral excellence that defines civilized man leads the Egyptians inexorably to an animal, inanimate state. Thus, in Satire 15, the speaker's appeals to erudite philosophy, rhetoric, and allusion defeat his own argument. The Egyptians are at once civilized and barbaric, at once moral and immoral.

Throughout, Juvenal conjures his "Egypt" through stock tropes and generalities, providing little detail beyond the opening lines. Two of these lines are among the most carefully crafted in the entire poem, versions of the so-called golden line, balancing adjectives and nouns around a strong evocative verb. "A golden effigy of a sacred long-tailed monkey shines, where magic chords ring from broken-in-half Memnon and where ancient Thebes lies ruined with its hundred gates."¹⁰⁵ One effect is to underscore the verbs, *nitet* "shines" and *resonant* "ring," which make the scene more vivid by calling on the sensory imagination. Yet beyond this, Juvenal pays only perfunctory attention to the landscape, characterizing the lands near Coptos as simply "hot" and the town of Tentura as having "shady palms."¹⁰⁶ Despite the fact that the poem purports to describe an event happening at a specific place and time (the land between Tentura and Ombi during the consulship of Iuncus), there is virtually no detail about either community or even the gods they worship, the ostensible cause of the feud. It is for the reader to supply an understanding of the setting, relying largely on what he already knows. Let us then consider these two emblematic images, animal worship and the Colossus of Memnon, exploring what Juvenal's audience might bring to the text.

The prominence of animal worship in the visual arts of Roman Italy provides insight into the power of Juvenal's opening image. He calls here not just on hearsay but on a custom known to be real, and based on beliefs that at least some of his readers would have shared.¹⁰⁷ That Egyptians worshipped animals, *zoolatria*, was common knowledge in antiquity from Herodotus onward.¹⁰⁸ Representations of the practice, as with nilotic landscapes, intrigued Roman audiences. Two silver cups from Pompeii typify such works. Both have low relief scenes on all sides showing followers of Isis engaged in the veneration of animals. On the first cup, a goddess or priestess wearing the cow-horns of Hathor, carrying both a situla and sistrum, looks over her shoulder at a crocodile standing on an altar; on the opposite face, a priest approaches a bull standing on a high podium. On the second cup, another priest and priestess stand to either side of a gated entrance to a sanctuary, with a palm tree nearby. On the rear face, a falcon with a solar disk stands atop a lotiform altar.¹⁰⁹ [Figure 4.15a,b] The cups were found stacked together, associated with the skeleton of a man who died attempting to flee the eruption of Mount Vesuvius. In the view of the excavator, Matteo Della Corte, they likely came

(a)



(b)



FIGURE 4.15a, b. Two silver cups found in the Palaestra from Pompeii, decorated with scenes of Isis carrying a statuette of a crocodile and the Horus falcon on a pedestal (1st century CE).

Photo credit: Singer, Neg. D-DAI-Rom 68.295, 68.296.



FIGURE 4.16. The “Colossi of Memnon,” monumental statues of Amenhotep III (c. 1428–1397 BCE, Eighteenth Dynasty).

Photo credit: Ray Bowman.

from the nearby Praedia of Julia Felix, which had an opulent shrine to Isis.¹¹⁰ Regardless of which of the many Isiac sites in the city they may have come from, it seems likely that they were costly ritual implements. Their condition when found strongly suggests that they were heirlooms; both had once been covered in gold leaf, largely worn off from heavy use.

These cups remind us how vital the Egyptian origin of their gods was to Italian cults of Isis. Although there is no solid archaeological evidence that Italian sanctuaries fostered sacred animals, as did those in Egypt, the veneration of Egyptian deities in animal guise figured prominently in their practice: the sanctuary at Nemi worshipped Bubastis outright;¹¹¹ the sacrarium paintings from the sanctuary of in Pompeii, too, show a sophisticated awareness of the animal incarnations of the Egyptian pantheon.¹¹² In other locations, members of the Isis cult dedicated sculptures representing animals.¹¹³ Furthermore, representations of animal worship were also common in non-cultic contexts. The theme was a favorite in Egyptianizing fresco of the Third Style, for example but is also known in a wide range of media, from sculpture to gems to luxury-ware.

As important for establishing the Egyptian setting is Juvenal’s invocation of the famous singing Colossus of Memnon. [Figure 4.16] The statue gained its reputation for sounding a note at dawn not long after Roman conquest, but the number of epigrams spiked in the early second century CE, indicating the increasingly wide dissemination of knowledge about and interest in the phenomenon, culminating with a visit of Hadrian and his retinue in 130 CE. That Juvenal made mention of the statue, then, marked his account as *au courant* – particularly if we keep in mind that the date of the satire’s

composition might well have occurred soon after Hadrian's visit.¹¹⁴ The statue was one of two monumental representations of Amenhotep III in Western Thebes, widely identified in the Roman period with the mythic king of the Ethiopians and famous for emitting a musical note at sunrise. Through the second century CE, the Memnon became a locus for the performance of elite culture and power in Roman Egypt, both in fact and as a trope (for many writers of the second sophistic discussed the sculpture although they had not seen it). It was a favorite tourist destination, and visitors left their mark in the form of graffiti; the feet and lower legs of the statue were carved with 107 epigrams left there by visiting dignitaries and other travelers.¹¹⁵

The graffiti illustrate outsiders' interpretations of Egypt's landmarks and landscape. Juvenal's readers, most of whom would never have visited Egypt, would have had similar impressions of the place. As J. N. Adams has noted, the Memnon was one of only a few places in Egypt where Latin was consciously employed as an official language, particularly by Romans from Italy posted to Aegyptus in administrative and military capacities.¹¹⁶ The many graffiti attest that Romans knew of the statue and its reputation before visiting it, and stress the lasting impact on those about to return home.¹¹⁷ Often, writers used Homeric language and diction, making clear that this was a place where one could confront the mythic past head-on.¹¹⁸ This phenomenon of projecting preconceptions onto the physical landscape was not isolated to the Colossus. There are a great number of graffiti also from the "Pipes" (Σύριγγαι), the tombs in the Valley of the Kings. Although most preserve simple onomastics, some are written in allusive verse. One author, for example, invoked "Mountain nymphs who haunt the Nilotic height," echoing Greek hexameter.¹¹⁹ One tomb was thought to house the bones of Memnon.¹²⁰ The Colossus and other landmarks represent an Egypt people *thought* they knew, and, in a very real sense, brought with them from home, based on their own understandings of the gods and their origins. Indeed, the identification of the statue with Memnon persisted despite alternate local traditions told by guides or other interpreters. Pausanias acknowledged the variants openly, stating that locals understood the sculpture as representing an Egyptian king; some of the writers of the graffiti on the statue were also aware that he had an Egyptian identity.¹²¹ Visitors to these sites imposed a narrative of their own devising onto the landscape around them. And it is this construction of Egypt on which Juvenal calls in the opening of Satire 15. For all its literary style and allusion, Juvenal's Egypt is little more than dressed-up boilerplate. He counts on these well known tropes to conjure a landscape suited to the story of a local riot taking on epic proportions.

If they saw Egypt as mythic, what might Juvenal's readers have known of the two small towns in which the dramatic struggle at the heart of the work played out? Juvenal's description of the towns as neighboring suggests that they were situated in close proximity near the urban center of Coptos. Juvenal's Tentura, a variant of the spelling Tentyra, is widely understood to be Dendara. There is no consensus, however, about the location of the town that he calls

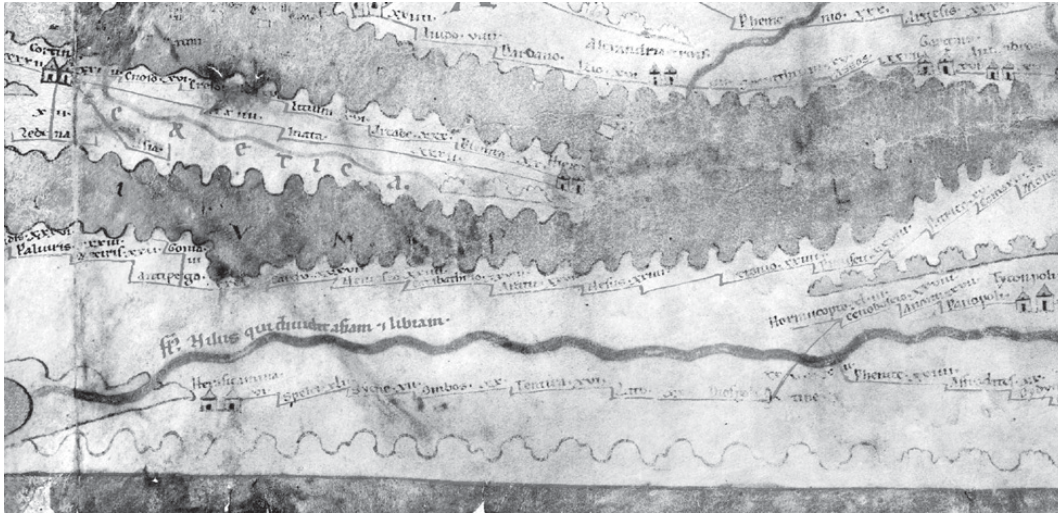


FIGURE 4.17. Detail of the Peutinger Table, with Ombos and Tentura, distance marked as “xx” (c. late fourth to early fifth c. CE).

Photo credit: Österreichische Nationalbibliothek Bildarchiv und Grafiksammlung.

Ombi. As I make clear later in this chapter, there are a number of strong reasons to associate Juvenal’s Ombi with Ombos or Omboi, Kom Ombo, located roughly 144 miles up-river from Tentura.¹²² This distance presents obvious problems for literal readers of Juvenal’s account, who must imagine the towns to be near enough to each other that the residents of one can quickly run to attack the other in the night. On this basis, some scholars have argued that the seeming transparent link of Ombi/Ombos/Kom Ombo is a false etymology, and that Juvenal’s Ombi was a different town, modern Naqada – near to Dendara.¹²³ One author, in fact, even went so far as to claim that there was archaeological evidence of a wall separating the two towns described in the poem.¹²⁴ Yet insistence on the poem’s historical and geographical veracity has drawn attention away from the contemporary sources of information about Egyptian geography available to Juvenal and his reading audience, including technical geographical handbooks, schematic maps, and textual itineraries.

Of the two towns, Tentura/Tentyra was by far the better known. It was first mentioned by Strabo, who fixed its location as just north of Coptos and noted the unusual customs of its people. He says that the town did not venerate the crocodile as did so many other towns; residents treated crocodiles as animals, and as a result could wrangle them without fear. He says that Augustus brought a group of Tentyritai to Rome, where they put on quite a show with their crocodiles.¹²⁵ Subsequently, the town appears in technical literature, though the sources that mention it vary in the small particulars of orthography. It is “Tentyrites” in Pliny, who says that the nome took its name after the town.¹²⁶ In a slightly later work, Ptolemy Claudius distinguished between town and nome, “the nome is Tentytrites, and the city is Tentura.”¹²⁷ It is



“Tentira” in the Antonine itinerary and also on the Peutinger Table, which glosses the distance from Ombos, incorrectly, as twenty miles. [Figure 4.17] On the basis of these sources, it is possible that Juvenal’s readers had heard of the town and had some awareness of its residents’ relationship with the crocodile, a reputation suited to Juvenal’s subject matter. Ombi, in contrast, is attested *only* in technical literature, which located it at the first cataract near Syene, though still in the nome of Coptos. Pliny knows it as the head of a local prefecture or nome, and names it Ombites;¹²⁸ Ptolemy Claudius calls it by two names, Ὀμβοί or Ὀμβροί.¹²⁹ The Antonine itineraries include locations called Ambos and Contra Ombos, on the opposite sides of the river. Neither these manuals nor the earlier itineraries from which they drew were texts in wide circulation.¹³⁰ They prove beyond doubt, however, that for anyone who had a firsthand understanding of Egypt, the two towns were nothing like neighbors and did not even lie along the same travel routes. They were about a week’s journey distant from each other and on opposite sides of the river.

“Tentura” and “Ombi” on the Antoninine Itineraries, distance in *milia pasuum*¹

ItAnt 63 ab urbe	ItAnt 65 item per partem arabicam trans Nilum
159,2 Tentira xxvii (27)	165,1 Ambos xxx (30)
159,3 Contra Copto xii (12)	165,2 Contra Apollonos xl (40)
159,4 Papa viii (8)	165,3 Contra Lato xl (40)
160,1 Hermunti xxx (30)	165,4 Thebas xl (40)
160,2 Lato xxiii (24)	165,5 Vico Apollonos xxii (22)
160,3 Apollonis Superiore xxxii (32)	165,5 Coptos xxii (22)
160, 4 Contra Tumuis xviii (19)	
160,5 Contra Ombos xxiii (24)	

1 Text after Talbert 2010, Appendix 9, 224–25.

Nevertheless, the Peutinger Table does suggest a direct relationship between the sites labeled Tentira and Ombos and thus offers purchase on the question of why Juvenal and his readers might have understood them to be close together. Much of the information on the Peutinger Table derives from earlier sources, including some that predated the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE. These sources may have included cartographic maps, itineraries, or *tabellaria*, which were place names organized in list form in order of geographic proximity, often with measurements indicating distance; names on the itineraries or *tabellaria* could appear in different cases, sometimes in the nominative and sometimes in the accusative, according to the original source of information.¹³¹ As noted earlier, the Peutinger Table locates the two towns near to the border, and notes the distance between them as twenty miles. Considering Juvenal's source material as something like this – whether in itinerary, inscription, or map form – helps resolve an oddity in his discussion of the towns. As noted, Juvenal says that the fight took place “between neighboring Ombi and Tentura,” *inter finitimos . . . Ombos et Tentura*.¹³² Both nouns appear to be accusatives governed by *inter*. Even in antiquity, this syntax occasioned some difficulty for readers. There are a number of slight variants to both words in the many extant manuscripts of Satire 15,¹³³ and scholiasts explained to their audiences that “Tentyra is an accusative plural, just as is “Maenala” in Vergil Ecl. 10.55,” in order to smooth over the rough patch.¹³⁴ An in-depth discussion of morphology is beyond the present scope, but suffice it to remark that Tentura/Tentyra is so rare that we cannot expect its declension to be regular. (For Ptolemy Claudius, however, the nome Tentyrites was masculine, but the city Tentura was feminine.¹³⁵) Juvenal himself may not have known the gender of the noun, but appears to follow a source that lists Ombos and Tentura in this way and in which a Latin neuter accusative plural and a Greek feminine nominative singular would be difficult to distinguish. Taken all together, this technical discussion underscores a simple yet vital point: Ombi and Tentura were on the map, literally and figuratively. For any reader possessed of a chart like the Peutinger Table or a list of place names, that the towns were “neighbors” was manifest, for distance between them would be collapsed. They were the last two towns in Egypt within the boundaries of the empire. In other words, the seemingly specific location of the action of Juvenal 15 is both real and imagined; Juvenal relies on readers to make logical connections about places they may have heard of or seen on a map or itinerary but had not themselves been to.

All this established, let us look in depth at the passage describing the riot between Tentura and Ombi:

An old and even ancient feud, an immortal hatred and never-healing wound, burns still between neighboring Ombi and Tentura. [There is] the deepest

wrath within the people on both sides, because each place hates the gods of its neighbors, since each believes that the only gods which should be cultivated are those which it itself worships. But during one people's festival, a chance was seen by the generals and leading men of their enemies, [a chance] that must be seized so that [their enemies] should experience neither a happy and delightful day, nor the joys of a great dinner with tables placed before temples and at the crossroads and with the bed-cushion wakeful all night, which the seventh sun finds lying around for some time, night and day. Truly Aegyptos is uncultivated, but luxurious, as much as I myself have noted: the uncouth crowd does not yield to famous Canopus.¹³⁶

Egypt is here a land of super-abundance. Juvenal expects his readers to know of the extravagant reputation of Canopus, and places particular emphasis on the first-person (*notavi*). Yet he extends this image of profligacy deep into the farthest reaches of the province, through his descriptions of festivities so opulent that they last seven days and nights. Even the common people (*turba*, and elsewhere in the poem, *vulgus*), live like kings. Yet even as Juvenal insists on the foreignness of the place, its customs, and its over-the-top luxury, he roots his descriptions of ritual in Roman votive practices, thereby also making them familiar: the Egyptian gods, though animals, are *numina* that the Egyptians celebrate at temples and crossroads, *templa* and *compita*.¹³⁷

As tensions mount, the Egyptians evolve. At first, they fight without weapons, though nevertheless with intensity. Juvenal says that no participant has escaped untouched, "you would already see broken faces in all the ranks, and other conditions, bones gaping from ruptured cheeks, fists full of blood from eyes."¹³⁸ Even so, they deem the fight to be mere child's play,¹³⁹ and soon turn to weapons, first rocks and then arrows. Finally, the battle culminates in the act of cannibalism. It is worth examining the structure of this entire episode, including Juvenal's pointed aside.

And now the fight grows more fierce. With upper arms bent, they begin to throw rocks, sought out on the earth, home-made weapons for war, and not the sort of rock, such as both Turnus and Ajax [threw], or as heavy as that weight with which Tydides broke the hip-bone of Aeneas, but the sort which hands unlike theirs are able to throw from right hands born in our own time. *For our race was growing lesser even with Homer still living. The earth now rears bad and puny men. Therefore whatsoever god that looks down, laughs and despises. But let the story come back from this bend in the river.*

Augmented by subsidiary troops, one side dares to bring out iron, and renews the fight with threatening arrows raised. Those who dwell in neighboring Tentura of the shady palm-tree show their backs in swift flight to the attacking Ombi. One man, hurrying his path because of his excessive terror,

slips and is caught. The victorious crowd eats him whole, cut into very many bits and pieces so that one dead body might suffice for many men, with even the bones gnawed down. And [the crowd], content with a raw cadaver, did not cook him in burning copper-pot or on skewers: [they] thought it too tedious a thing to wait for the hearth. Here, one may rejoice because they did not violate fire, which you, o Prometheus, gave as a gift to the world, after you snatched it from the highest part of heaven. I give thanks to the element, and think that you too rejoice. But he who endures the act of biting a corpse – he never ate anything more willingly than this meat.¹⁴⁰

This passage is the heart of the narrative and also the point at which the strands of argument intersect. A number of shifts in subject serve to emphasize the voice of the speaker, as Juvenal quickly moves between a strong first person point of view (*ipse notavi, reor*) to the direct address of Prometheus, who gave man fire. The Egyptians are so eager to consume the man that they cast off their humanity, epitomized by the hearth as symbol of culture. That Juvenal previously described the lands around Coptos as boiling-hot intensifies this irony. Throughout this section, there are plays between literal and figurative meaning, leading to a kind of double-speak between Juvenal as narrator and as author: the speaker forces home his point that Egyptians are barbarous, but in so doing implicates all humanity in his critique. If the reader responds to the story with revulsion, then passion rules him in place of logic. Any resulting conviction is predicated on emotion (prejudice), not reason (philosophy).

The Egyptian setting allows for a series of double entendres. When the speaker says that man has grown smaller since the days of Homer, he means it literally; the verb *decreasco* describes the waning of the moon and the shortening of the day throughout the year. Hence, the Egyptian protagonists are not physically capable of lifting the massive stones hurled by the heroes of the past. According to geographical theories of race, those peoples living in Southern Egypt and Ethiopia were burnt black by the sun, were minute in size, or lacked human features – all products of the extreme heat of their homelands.¹⁴¹ As we have seen, too, even those like Strabo, who considered Egypt's "small men" to be a fiction, nevertheless believed that the parched landscape shaped the culture and people living in the region. Yet the adjective Juvenal's speaker uses, *pusillus*, is also a staple of moralizing literature – used for feeble men, weak in spirit.¹⁴² When he says that the earth rears "bad and puny men," he refers to modern man in general. Similarly, there is another emphatic play on literal meaning when the speaker grandly announces the resumption of the real story after the digression, using the word *deverticulum*. Taken literally, this suggests a bend in a river or road; it is an evocative way of describing a narrative tangent, given the story's setting along the banks of the Nile. But as a rhetorical device, a *deverticulum* can also indicate a point of persuasion,

the crux of an argument, or even a diversion used for the express purpose of making a weak argument stronger.¹⁴³ What for the speaker has been a mere digression is in fact the poem's universal critique: when the gods look down on the scenes he describes, they do not just blame the Egyptians – *any and every god* despises and derides all humankind.

Juvenal's last image of the Egyptians, toward the poem's end, deftly brings a number of themes back into conversation – their feeble nature, their small size, and the fecundity of their lands.

What misfortune now drove them? What hunger so great and weapons poised to strike their palisades compelled them to dare such a detestable monstrosity? Was their indignation aroused with the earth around Memphis all dried up, against the Nile unwilling to rise? Never did the terrible Cimbri and Bistones, nor the warlike Sauromatae nor the monstrous Agathyrsi [rage] with the rage with which the weak and useless [*imbelle et inutile*] crowd vented their fury – accustomed to set their teeny sails to earthenware bean-shaped boats, and to press the painted tile-boat forward upon short oars. And you will not find a penalty for this crime, nor will you prepare suitable punishments for these people, in whose mind anger and hunger are similar and equal.¹⁴⁴

The speaker claims that Egyptians, though weak, act more aggressively than even the most warlike tribes from all ends of the empire,¹⁴⁵ and there are no extenuating circumstances that lighten their culpability. To the contrary, the Nile rises in flood every year, and the abundant Egypt Juvenal has conjured need not fear the loss of yield brought by a low flood. The word *phaselos* describes a light skiff, so named because shaped like a bean, and often used by poets to conjure the image of a leisured life.¹⁴⁶ Juvenal may even pick up a phrase from the Georgics, in which Vergil described the Egyptians sailing their flooded fields in painted boats of this type; his image underscores how easy it is for them to cultivate lands so fertile, puttering about in decorated craft more suited to pleasure than work.¹⁴⁷ Juvenal thus emphasizes how ridiculous are the Egyptians, fierce but unproductive, possessed of strong passions but lacking reason, unable to distinguish between the appetites that govern the body and the mind, hunger and emotion. This powerful statement reveals yet another paradox in the speaker's argument. The crime that the Egyptians have committed is so heinous that there is no conceivable appropriate punishment. The second-person address places the reader in the role of judge and jury, but the future tense robs him of the ability to come up with his own solution to the conundrum – and thus the Egyptians go unpunished. Who, in this situation, is truly useless, *inutilis*? The uncomfortable answer is the reader himself.

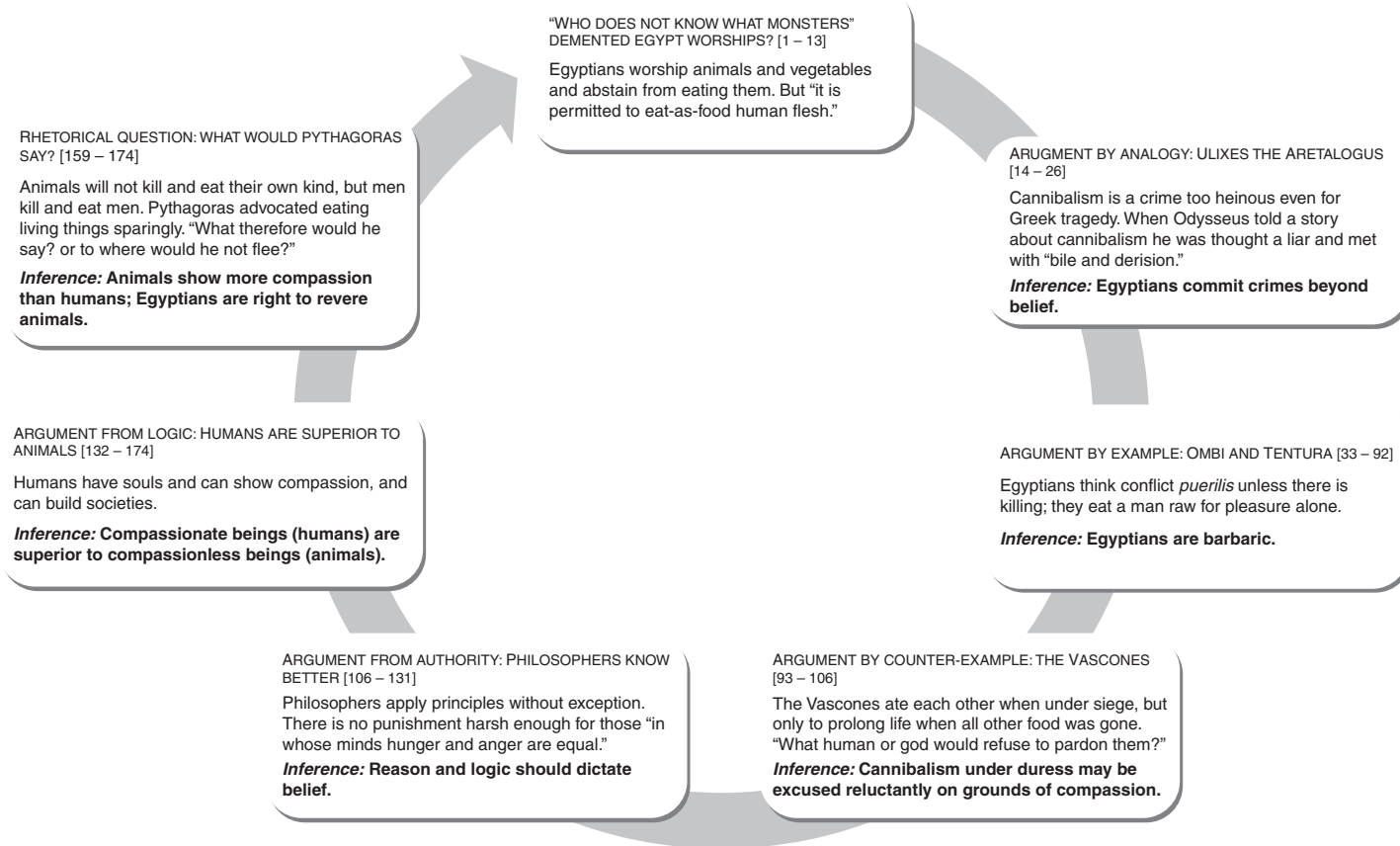
By the end of the poem, Juvenal's Egypt emerges as a shimmering mirage – appearing substantive only on cursory inspection and when considered at a

remove. He has offered his readers a tall-tale, both a *portentum* and a *fabula*. The imagined place of Egypt serves Juvenal's agenda so well because it literally is the land beyond belief, a place about which almost anything seems plausible. References to peoples and places occur throughout, many pressing hard the notion of violence caused by war and cultural difference at the borders, both in the past and present. So, in his catalogue of barbaric tribes, many of whom have been charged with cannibalism or human sacrifice, Juvenal includes the Vascones who lived near the Pyrenees, the Agathyrsi from Dacia, the Cimbri from far-northern Gaul, the Sauromatae and the Bistones from the Thracian steppes.¹⁴⁸ By the second century CE, however, many of these peoples had been absorbed by the Roman Empire. Juvenal states overtly that the wildest of places see themselves as cultured in the present day, even practicing Classical rhetoric. "Now the entire globe has the Greek Athens, and ours too; fluent Gaul taught the court-pleaders of the Brittani. Even Thyle speaks with a rhetor having been brought in."¹⁴⁹ Volusius Bithynicus, the addressee of the poem, epitomizes the "Romanized" man. His name suggests that he – or his ancestors – came once upon a time from remote Bithynia in Asia Minor. Thus, Juvenal moves along the outskirts of the empire, all the while in fact satirizing Rome. He implicates those readers who have fallen prey to the speaker's logic in his critique. Those who are willing to believe the Egyptians capable of abominable acts based solely on the most superficial knowledge – that they worship animals – are no different than the barbarous protagonists of his parable. "Each believes that the only gods which should be cultivated are those which it itself worships."

* * *

Although they are roughly contemporary, we can draw no direct link between Juvenal's description of Egypt and that expressed by the Vatican Nile. Yet both required viewers and readers to bring something to the table and relied on a body of common knowledge about Egypt's landscape, flora, fauna, and the culture and religion of those who lived there. Both, too, put their images of Egypt to a specific purpose, though those purposes differed. Juvenal's Egypt is a patchwork portrait of preconception and stereotype, constructed carefully so that he may *dehumanize* its residents. The Vatican Nile, in contrast, rendered abstract space concrete by embodying a feature of the landscape, humanizing it with the goal of underlining its abundance and fertility. Both show that visual and textual modes of geographical description were mutually informing. Juvenal's Egypt relied on cartographic sources that were not representational but were nevertheless visual: schematic plans that organized place names by physical proximity. The Vatican Nile and Louvre Tiber imposed narratives on their personifications that drew on textual sources, revealing the origins of those who lived on the rivers' banks. Above all, these examples remind us of how critical it is to pay attention to context, genre, and audience. There was no single "image of Egypt" but many – each born of the circumstances of its situation and suited to the expectations of viewers and readers.

APPENDIX 4.1. ARGUMENT OF JUVENAL, SATIRE XV



CONCLUSION: THE AFTERLIVES OF OBJECTS

In this book, I have advocated taking another look at Egyptian and Egyptian-inspired works of art from Roman Italy: from the small, such as the votive offering reused as a cinerary urn by P. Claudius Pulcher, to the massive, Augustus' obelisks; from depictions of the gods, such as the panel-painting of Io and Isis at the Canopus from Pompeii, to poems and sculptures that describe the lives and struggles of imaginary people living near or even beyond the empire's edge. Each case tells a story about how people living in Italy came into contact and then came to terms with a culture different from their own. I return now to a version of the question with which I began. How can we make sense of this cultural phenomenon more generally? And how does Roman-period interest relate to the fascination with Egypt of other times, places, and peoples?

Long before the arrival of the Romans, Egypt's position as crossroads between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea drew outsiders, including Assyrians, Persians, Nubians, Jews, and Greeks, as colonists, merchants, mercenaries, and invaders. These varied modes of contact resulted in Egypt's rich, multilingual culture – unparalleled in antiquity, fascinating for the fusions it created and for its often inequitable social dynamics. Yet, from the start, cultural interactions within Egypt also had an impact far beyond. Conquerors took away portable materials as spoils of war or manipulated the monumental landscape as a way of demonstrating control. Assurbanipal stripped obelisks in Heliopolis of their precious metal paneling; Darius brought both artworks and Egyptian sculptors to Persepolis; the Ptolemies moved antiquities large and small down the Nile to Alexandria. As acts of state, these seizures and interventions were also critical for audiences at home; indeed, we often know of them primarily from historical sources outside Egypt, intended to chronicle a ruler's power for his own subjects and posterity. Wide-ranging trade networks, too, put innumerable smaller materials in motion from or through Egypt to places all around the Mediterranean long before Roman conquest, whether precious raw goods like hippopotamus ivory or lapis lazuli, or goods

of Egyptian handicraft like faience and jewelry. However modest, these archaeological remains testify to real connections between communities of people living vast distances apart, so far that the producers and consumers were necessarily unknown and unknowable to each other except in the most general way. All of these kinds of cultural contact – whether trade-based or conquest-driven – created curiosity. Those who visited and subsequently wrote about Egypt invariably left behind documents filtered through the lens of personal and cultural experience, testifying to as many “Egypts” as there were observers.

Considered from this perspective, the Roman appropriation of Egyptian artworks is not unique, and their fascination with a place at the edge of their empire unsurprising and, indeed, to be expected. As the rulers of Egypt, Romans took their place at the end of a long line and were the inheritors of many traditions of representing and writing about the place for the eyes of those living far away. The Roman engagement with Egypt, however, stands out in scope. The duration of Roman control and the need to harness the Nile’s abundant agricultural resources to feed the standing army and urban populations meant near constant interaction on a large and ever-growing scale. The result for Roman Italy was that people, ideas, religion, and physical goods moved quickly and in numbers – and the result for us is that we can study an array of Egyptian imported artifacts and artworks inspired by Egypt, in settings imperial and ordinary.

Faced with such abundant material, therefore, our challenge as scholars and students is to use this evidence to the fullest. It is easy to see how the Roman taste for Egyptian-looking artworks related to the struggle for power between Octavian and Mark Antony, and how the economic and geopolitical need to control the province’s resources influenced imperial affairs; it is also easy to see the connection between veneration of the Egyptian gods and artworks that document individual acts of piety or create communal space for their worship. Assessing the appeal of the exotic in these contexts is both necessary and right. We go astray only if we stop there, failing to look deeper, beyond history as described by Tacitus and Suetonius to the histories we must painstakingly reconstruct from inscriptions, papyri, and archaeological assemblages speaking to the experiences of people from all social classes and backgrounds. At times, too, it is necessary to set aside what we already “know,” particularly in the case of imported Egyptian artifacts, most often characterized by date and place of creation. Modern audiences are no less intrigued by ancient Egypt, a place that was at once a desert and an oasis, a lively culture preoccupied with creating the ideal afterlife, a society of kings and slaves. Our own understandings, of course, change often with new discoveries or new methodologies. Although Romans were fascinated by many of the same facets of Egyptian culture, they relied on entirely different sources of information, including their own myths, histories, or oral traditions,

encounters with people of Egyptian origin or members of the Egyptian cults, and firsthand impressions of Egyptian and Egyptian-looking artworks and monuments. Looking deeper, whether as student, museum-goer, or scholar, means making every effort to take these sources of information on their own terms in the *Roman* settings in which they were found – not isolating those aspects that deal with Egypt, but looking at how they relate to wider patterns of story-telling, geographical representation, and art production.

In this regard, the material is not limited in what it can reveal but rather so rich as to be open to many approaches, leaving great scope for future work integrating *aegyptiaca* into studies of Roman visual and literary culture. I have not claimed to be comprehensive, but throughout I have attempted, in the context of certain key works and sites, to show how fronting questions about context, genre, and medium can help us push past the superficial fact of these works' Egyptian-ness. My own exploration of the Roman taste for the exotic began by asking how imported Egyptian artifacts arrived in Italy. After conquest, Romans brought a wide range of goods beyond staple food-stuffs from Alexandria to Italy, including decorative granites, precious metals, gems, papyrus products, perfumes, spices – and antiquities. That imports were part of the luxury trade explains their numbers, concentrated in Rome and other well-connected cities. It also explains the place of “the Egyptian” in Roman aesthetics. Artists working in Italy began to include Egyptian-looking motifs in media associated with wealth and prestige, including fresco, sculpture, and the minor arts.

Throughout this work, I have brought literary, visual, and epigraphic sources to bear in the hope of better understanding how the works discussed earlier appealed to contemporary audiences. The Vatican Nile, Juvenal's Fifteenth Satire, the Montecitorio and Piazza del Popolo obelisks and many others – each speaks to one or more visions of Egypt, whether the work in question relates a variant of Isis' origin story or uses that story as an allegory; whether it reflects attitudes to Rome's expanding empire or comments on modes of thought that stereotyped people according to the place of their birth. Taken together, the monuments in this book speak to the eclectic tastes of Romans in Italy, which prized material culture that was recognizably foreign and also recognizably antique. Roman patrons were not connoisseurs of Egyptian and Egyptian-looking material, however, in the sense that their valuations rested on recognized standards or on authoritative information about a work's former function or monetary worth in Egypt. (To make that assumption is akin to asking whether the Romans in Italy knew then what we know now about Egyptian culture.) To the contrary, Romans were omnivorous collectors of things Egyptian, which they put to whatever uses seemed fit to them and to which they ascribed their own, sometimes contradictory, meanings.

Ultimately, what makes this subject so fascinating is the enduring and shifting appeal of the same physical objects as they move through time and

space. These are monuments that have not one, or even two, but many stories to tell – made, traded, seized, modified, displayed, and redisplayed repeatedly over the course of more than a millennium. After its discovery, the Vatican Nile travelled from Rome to Paris and back again, first as spoil of war and then as a repatriated artwork, playing a prominent role in one of the first international debates about the value of cultural property. The finds and sculptures of the *aedes Isidis* in Pompeii attracted tourists from the time of their rediscovery [Frontispiece] and were themselves used as artists' models and by antiquarians attempting to break ground in the study of Egyptian culture and religion. The Montecitorio obelisk was discovered broken and burned, eventually repaired from Egyptian granite quarried from other Roman ruins found in close proximity. The obelisk now stands before the Italian parliament building, once again serving as a meridian marking the march of time. Monuments and artworks like these have long held out the promise of direct, personal, and unmediated contact between the living present and a culture and time far distant. Yet because no physical thing can entirely keep such a promise – understandings of the past are always negotiated by present-day expectations – their meaning has shifted constantly according to the knowledge, belief, perspectives, and needs of their viewers. In this sense, scholars past and present are also audiences. In studying, decoding, translating, and categorizing material culture, we create our own narratives about the past. The questions we ask of these monuments necessarily constrain the kinds of answers they can give; when we ask new questions, we see, in a real sense, new things.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

- 1 That is, drawing upon the most common Latin meaning of *invenio*, meaning “to encounter or discover” (e.g., *OLD* s.v. *invenio* 1, 4), and the implication in English derivatives that the discovery is mental, reflecting imagination, genius, and sometimes fabrication. (e.g., *OED*, s.v. *invent*, v, 2 a, b, c).
- 2 I avoid the application of the term “orientalism,” the influential conception of East-West relations introduced by Edward Said in his 1979 book of that title, to the ancient world (Said 1979, 1994). Said’s conception of orientalism has been both influential (see, e.g., Telmissany and Schwarz 2010) and controversial (see, e.g., Warraq 2007). Of greatest concern for present purposes, Said had as an express goal the interrogation of the practices and institutions of the western academy, that is, the scholarly study of the “East” from the time of Napoleon. It is courting trouble to apply a critical apparatus historically grounded in the modern period to the ancient Mediterranean. Nevertheless, the subject matter certainly lends itself to similar questions, sometimes to our profit. Said’s articulation of imaginary geography, in which participants of cultural systems describe and thereby construct places far beyond their ken certainly helps us understand the ancient world. For a cogent exploration of the value of Said’s orientalism to literary sources of the Roman period, see Parker 2011, and as relevant to *nilotica* and other Egyptian-looking material, see Versluys 2002.
- 3 For accessible introductory surveys, see, in English, Alfano 2001; in German, Maderna 2005. See also note 33 for discussion of new approaches to the material and note 18 for bibliography.
- 4 See, e.g., the extraordinary case of the loan of C. Novius Eunus, based in part on speculation on the grain yield, TPSulp 51, 52, 67, 68, and discussion in Lintott 2002. For fuller discussion of Rome’s economic interests in Egyptian products, see Chapter 1.
- 5 “Even while Tiberius was emperor, it happened that there was such a lack of *charta* that controllers for dispensing it were selected from the senate, otherwise life was in a state of turmoil.” Plin. *NH* 13.89, *factumque iam Tiberio principe inopia chartae ut e senatu darentur arbitri dispensandis; alias in tumultu vita erat*. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.
- 6 Verg. 8.675–8.723; *Carmen de Bello Actiaco*, P. Herc. 817.
- 7 Ov. *Met.* 9.688–90, *inerant lunaria fronti | cornua cum spicis nitido flaventibus auro | et regale decus*.
- 8 For discussion of these examples and the historical situation following conquest, see Chapter 2.
- 9 See, e.g., Caligula’s response to the Jews in 38 CE (Philo *In Flacc.* and *Leg.*), and Claudius’ “Letter to the Alexandrians” in 41 CE (P. Lond. 1912).
- 10 Vespasian in Alexandria, Suet. *Vesp.* 7; Tac. *Hist.* 4.82; on the night in the Iseum Campense, Joseph. *BJ* 7.123. On the episode, Luke 2010.

- 11 Dio. Cass. 69.11.
- 12 For the Iseum and Serapaeum Campense, see note 18. On Hadrian's Villa, Adembri and Mari 2006; de Vos 2004; Mari and Sgalambro 2007.
- 13 Recent work on the Egyptian cults has taken a fresh look at the sources for ritual and mystery, no longer treating the Egyptian cults as tied to the underworld of Roman cities or populated largely by the lower classes, but rather stressing the connections between Egyptian cults and their communities. I direct the reader to the general-audience syntheses and bibliography of Bommas 2012; Bricault 2013; Versluys 2010. Fundamental are the collections of edited inscriptions with full bibliography of Laurent Bricault (*RICIS*), as well as his *Atlas* (Bricault 2001), and the *Biblioteca Isiaca* series that brings new material quickly to international audiences (Bricault, ed. 2008; Bricault and Veymiers 2011). Brill's RGWR series, following after the many and varied offerings of ÉPRO, are also indispensable. (Recently, see, e.g., Bricault 2004; Versluys et al. 2007; Bricault and Versluys 2010.) For rituals and myths across Mediterranean communities, see Alvar 2008, Bommas 2005, and sources cited. For collections of the Italian material, much of it from sanctuaries, see *Iside*; Malaise 1972a, 1972b; Quack 2005; and sources cited in note 18.
- 14 For technical discussion of the fragments and concise statements of the problems (which are many), Moyer 2011, 95–96; Verbrugghe and Wickersham 1996, especially 115–18; and the introductory essay in Waddell 1980.
- 15 See Moyer 2011, 84–103.
- 16 See discussion of Plutarch and Apuleius, Chapter 3; Hermapion, Chapter 2.
- 17 E.g., on Jewish culture, see Gmirkin 2006; Graeco-Egyptian culture, see Moyer 2011, 104–41.
- 18 Academic inquiry into *aegyptiaca* has, in some senses, become a discipline in its own right, bringing together international scholarly communities interested in Egyptian religion and material culture and trained in many disciplines, including Classical Studies, Egyptology, Art History, and Religious Studies. I have done my best throughout this volume to stay abreast of recent work through 2011, but with the caveat that this is a fast-paced field. What follows is not a comprehensive bibliography, therefore, but suggestions for further reading for a student or scholar desiring to better understand the corpus of materials, which is vast. Still indispensable are the seminal works of Malaise 1972b and Roulet 1972, and the exhibition compendia of *Iside*, *Egittomania*, and *AGR*, as well as Bianchi et al. 1988; de Rachelowitz and Partini 1999; Lembke 1994; Lollio Barberi et al. 1995; Walker and Higgs 2001. For obelisks, see D'Onofrio 1967; Iversen 1968; Curran et al. 2009; Sorek 2010. For *nilotica*, see Whitehouse 1980; Versluys 2002; Clarke 2007a. For painting, see de Vos 1980. For gems, see Sfameni 2003, Veymiers 2009. For modern Egyptomania, see Curran 2007; Lo Sardo 2008. For discussion of recent approaches, see note 33.
- 19 See Curran 2007, 231–34. For a concise but detailed description of the object, see Spanedda in Lo Sardo 2008, 110.
- 20 Sternberg-el Hotabi 1994.
- 21 See the treatments of Sternberg-el Hotabi 1994; Leospo 1978; Bongrani Fanfoni 1991; Derchain 1983.
- 22 Seyffarth 1881.
- 23 For the transcription, translation, and discussion of this piece, Perdu 1985; Pirelli 1998. See also the focus upon this object as Egyptian by Verhoeven, *AGR* no. 166.
- 24 On new approaches to Egyptian history and historiography, see, e.g., Moyer 2002, 2006, 2011; Muntz 2011.
- 25 For a recent description and application of *chaîne opératoire*, see, e.g., Farbstain 2011.
- 26 See especially Hoskins 2006, and bibliography cited. Still critical are Appadurai 1986a, b; Geary 1986; Dobres and Robb 2000. Art objects created with the express purpose of making a visual impact, the ultimate success or failure of which depends on adherence to communal systems of aesthetics and value, often possess a powerful agency of this kind, Gell 1998. For treatments applying theories of affective material culture to ancient societies, see, e.g., Burns 2010, 20–43; Meskell 2004, 1–38; Jeffreys 2003; Wilburn 2013.

- 27 The dominant terms used today for such reuse are *spoliation* (the reuse of materials, often architectural, sometimes for ideological purpose and sometimes for economic expedience) and *appropriation* (the act of taking an earlier artwork and recreating it, through a shift in context or physical manipulation). For definitions, see, e.g., Nelson 2003; Elsner 2006; Hansen 2003, 14.
- 28 Steiner 2001.
- 29 See further on the theory of object biography, Chapter 1.
- 30 Van den Horst 1984; Iversen 1971.
- 31 See, e.g., Keesling 2005
- 32 See, e.g., Malaise 2005.
- 33 Important new approaches include the work of Versluys (2002, 2007, 2010), who questioned long-standing assumptions about the religious meaning of nilotic imagery, brought statistical inquiry to their study, and continues to break ground in framing new lines of inquiry. Swetnam-Burland (2007, 2010) explores the value of an approach grounded in object-biography. See also Elsner 2006; Vout 2003; Lorenz 2005, who address the exotic/religious dichotomy and question the place of *aegyptiaca* in Roman art history.
- 34 For fullest discussion, still Tran Tam Tinh 1971, 28–49; for a recent example that looks at the painting as evidence, Alvar 2008, 311; Gasparini 2006.
- 35 For the ibis as locating these scenes in the imaginary realm, *Iside*, V.77. For literary sources on the ibis, which show that ancient audiences believed the bird to live only in Egypt, Arnott 2007, Ibis (1), 73–74.

1 EGYPTIAN OBJECTS, ROMAN CONTEXTS: APPROPRIATION AND AESTHETICS

- 1 On Egyptomania generally, see Curl 1982, 1994; Lo Sardo et al. 2008; Ziegler et al. 1994.
- 2 I use the term “aesthetics” broadly to mean the set of norms that govern the social valuation of artworks within a society or group.
- 3 I here use “staple goods” to refer to cereals, oil, and other consumable products and food-stuffs, and “luxury goods” to refer to those intended for adornment or display, including gems, perfumes, metals, and artworks. In so doing, I use these categories flexibly, for they are admittedly not exclusive and the evidence does not substantiate a clear difference in quantifiable economic terms. Rathbone (2007, 710) notes, for example, that the kinds of materials often designated by scholars as luxuries, including pepper, perfumes, and jewelry, were widely available and affordable enough that “reasonably prosperous” villagers had access to them. Nevertheless, it is a useful distinction particularly as it relates to the literary discourse of value and for thinking about the movement and trade of art-objects – a topic rarely addressed in art historical study. For recent work on the Roman economy and the challenges and rewards of the evidence, see especially Rathbone 2007 for discussion of Egypt, as well as Bang 2006, 2008; Jongman 2007; Kehoe 2007; Morley 2007a; Scheidel 2012. Useful, too, are approaches that focus on the social aspects of manufacture, e.g., Hawkins 2012.
- 4 Hölbl 1979, 2005; Bubenheimer-Erhart 2005; Del Francia 1991; De Salvia 1983, 2006, 1.1–1.104.
- 5 On trade and the economy of Delos, Reger 1994, 2002 (with note of goods coming through or from Egypt, chiefly papyrus and frankincense). For a recent treatment of Egyptian religion in Delos, Barrett 2011.
- 6 Thompson 1973, cat. 1; Walker and Higgs 2001, cat. 48. Other “Alexandrian” luxury goods are associated with Canosa, most notably a gold-glass bowl from a tomb, British Museum GR 1871.5–18.2. As evidence of direct trade and influence, these must be considered carefully. See Fraser 1972, III.267–68.
- 7 On the *liber linteus*, van der Meer 2007. The linen book may have been written c. 200 BCE but was not interred until later.

- 8 Cic. *Rab. Post.* 40.
- 9 On the grain trade, Rickman 1980; Erdkamp 2005. For its post-annexation organization, Erdkamp 2005, 178–237. For the changing economy of Roman Egypt and the range of goods moving from Alexandria to Italy (including much eastern Mediterranean trade, which used the city as an intermediate point), Rathbone 2007 and sources cited. Particularly useful for thinking about the importance of non-grain trade are Bang 2006, 2008.
- 10 For the Red Sea trade, see Young 2001, 27–89 and works cited; Casson 1984, 1989. For roads and canals, see, e.g., Young 2001, 74–80; Keay 2010; Sijpesteijn 1963; Sidebotham et al. 1997, 1998; Sidebotham 2011.
- 11 *quis enim non communicato orbe terrarum maiestate Romani imperii profecisse vitam putet commercio rerum ac societate festae pacis omniaque, etiam quae ante occulta fuerant, in promiscuo usu facta?* Plin. *NH* 14.2
- 12 See, e.g., Lao 2011.
- 13 Parker 2008, 147–202; Morley 2007b, 35–54; Young 2001, 14–18.
- 14 Foodstuffs: wheat, Plin. *NH* 18.63–70; figs, *NH* 15.68–83. Spices and medicines: natron, *NH* 31.106–22; mustard, *NH* 20.236–40; coriander, *NH* 20.216–18. Implements, pigments, and industrial products: reed pens, *NH* 16.156–58; red ochre, *NH* 35.35; paraetionium, *NH* 35.36.
- 15 Plin. *NH* 15.70.
- 16 Plin. *NH* 36.55.
- 17 Carey 2003, 91–92.
- 18 For compelling illustration of this point, see the distribution maps and discussion in Lazzarini 2004, 103–06.
- 19 Plin. *NH* 19.7–15.
- 20 On vinegar, Fraser 1972, III.272. On some implications of Egypt's agricultural economy, van Minnen 2000.
- 21 Egyptian natron, Plin. *NH* 31.106–22.
- 22 Tomlin 1992; Rarely do Egyptian amphorae account for more than 2 percent of those at any given site, but from the first century CE onward they appear across the western provinces. There is some evidence, too, that production in Egypt shifted to accommodate new trade patterns, with new kiln centers and an evolution in amphorae types. Tomber and Williams 2000.
- 23 See Picon and Vichy 2003; Saguí 2007, for the shift away from Egyptian natron in Late Antiquity.
- 24 Plin. *HN* 12.59.
- 25 Łukaszewicz 1999.
- 26 Young 2001, 23. On perfume production, see also Brun 2000.
- 27 Plin. *HN* 13.74–77.
- 28 *statuas ex eo Claudio Caesari procurator eius in urbem ex Aegypto advexit Vitrasius Pollio, non admodum probata novitae; nemo certe postea imitatus est.* Plin. *HN* 36.57.
- 29 See, e.g., Nista and Anderson 1989; de Nuccio and Ungaro 2002.
- 30 Louvre N 386-D 34-MR 889. The vase is little known. My information about provenience comes from the Louvre's files, courtesy of Mme. Catherine Briddoneau. For basic discussion, see also Musées de France 1970, no. 124; Martinez 2004, no. 1057, no. 1167, and antiquarian sources cited.
- 31 “The son of Re, beloved of Amun, son of Isis, Osorkon, the image of Amun, beloved of Amun-Re, master of the thrones of the two lands, master of the sky, lord of Karnak.” My rendering is after the translation (in French) of Musées de France 1970, no. 124. For full transcription of the hieroglyphic text, Gauthier 1914, 3.386; Pierret 1978, 2.86. Kitchen 1986 (211) dates the vase to Osorkon III.
- 32 Kitchen 1986, no. 177.
- 33 Myśliwiec 2000, 47–51; Kitchen 1986, 197–98.
- 34 Klemm 2008, 148–50.
- 35 La Rocca 1999.
- 36 CIL 6.1282 = ILS 882: *P. Claudius P. f | Ap. n. Ap. pron. | Pulcher q. quaesitor | pr. augur.*

- 37 On the sources for his life and career, PIR² C987. For the standing of the Claudii in the early imperial period, see Wiseman 1970b, especially 210–13. He suggests that P. Claudius Pulcher changed his name back from the innovative spelling (Clodius) for political expediency.
- 38 Suet. *Aug.* 62.
- 39 Cic. *Fam* 14.13a, 14.13b; Val. Max. 3.5.3.
- 40 Wiseman 1970b, 220.
- 41 Pliny's categories differ from those of modern geologists, who name the stone "calcite alabaster." Pliny calls it "alabastrites," and suggests it is a variant of onyx. Plin. *HN* 36.60. He also discusses variants of alabaster at *HN* 37.73. On Roman uses of the stone, see di Leo 1989a; Galetti 2006, 64–72.
- 42 The Egyptian import: de Nuccio 2002, 368, no. 68. (It dates to the second century BCE, date of Roman reuse unknown.) Other examples, including those for imperial burials: de Nuccio 2002, 369–70, nos. 69 and 70; cf. Guillianio 1979, nos. 145 and 149.
- 43 See Fairchild 1994 for discussion of populuxe goods in eighteenth century Paris.
- 44 On representations of statues in garden paintings, see Moormann 1988, 40–49.
- 45 See di Maria 1989. On faience figurines, see, e.g., di Gioia 2006, no. 10, a ceramic lizard similar in my view to representations of Sobek found in a kitchen in I, 12, 6. There remains a need for a complete inventory of both Egyptian and Egyptian-inspired sculptures from Pompeii.
- 46 For a bibliography on the temple contexts, see the Introduction. For materials from Horti Sallustiani, Hartswick 2004, 130–38. See also Lollo Barberi 1995, no. 11 = Roulet 1972, no. 179; Lollo Barberi 1995, no. 12 = Roulet 1972, 103; Lollo Barberi 1995, no. 13 = Roulet 1972, no. 180. As possibly from the Horti Sallustiani, Lollo Barbieri 1995, no. 45 = Roulet 1972, no. 186; Lollo Barbieri 1995, no. 49 = Roulet 1972, no. 44. Hadrian's Villa, too, had a large collection of Egyptian-looking works, though the degree to which this collection included imported objects is unclear. Discussion of material from Pompeii follows.
- 47 Lembke 1994, 34–36.
- 48 Sist 2008, 1991.
- 49 See Roulet 1972, Appendix III.
- 50 Lollo Barberi 1995, cat. 1–63. Nor do these figures capture the entire corpus, for the catalogue focuses on Rome, excluding Beneventum, Cumae, Pompeii, and other sites.
- 51 See Roulet 1972, 13–18.
- 52 Aufrère 2000.
- 53 Roulet 1972, 17.
- 54 Roulet, 1972, 13.
- 55 See, e.g., Lollo Barberi 1995, no. 12 = Roulet 1972, no. 103; Lollo Barberi 1995, no. 13 = Roulet 1972, 180; Lollo Barberi 1995, no. 40 = Roulet 1972, no. 24; Lollo Barberi 1995, no. 34 = Roulet 1972, no. 221.
- 56 On Egyptian spoils from Susa, Abdi 2002; from Persepolis, Schmidt 1957, II.68–69. On plundering in ancient societies, Miles 2008.
- 57 Empereur 1997; Abd El-Fattah 1998.
- 58 Brand 2007.
- 59 Lembke 1994, E16. See also a pharaoh of Amasis, with similar effacement of the name of the king, but not the gods, on the inscription, Lollo Barberi 1995, no. 9 = Roulet 1972, no. 176.
- 60 Some are especially tantalizing, such as a series of four canopic jars from two identifiable burials in Egypt; lacking context, we can only guess at the manner of their reuse. See di Maria 1989; Pirelli 2006, III.109–17.
- 61 For the object, Di Maria 1989, 134, no. 19. On deities guarding the threshold, August. *De civ. D.* 4.8.
- 62 D'Errico 1992, 6.2 notes that the object described as the "idolo" by the excavators, PAH I.180, appears to conflate two different known objects. Thus, there may have been two Egyptian objects found.

- 63 See for this object, Poole in *Alla ricerca* 1992, 6.3; for its discovery PAH I 172.
- 64 For example, the “Horus on the Crocodiles” stele found in a late antique shrine on the Esquiline, part of a complete assemblage of ritual objects. The stele bore traces of fire damage, suggesting that the object was burned *before* being installed in the shrine. For the context and its finds, Visconti 1885, 33; Ensoli 1993; Swetnam-Burland, forthcoming 2015. For bibliography on the Horus stele, Roulet 1972, cat. 316; *Iside* VI.50; Lollo Barberi 1995, no. 26. See also the discussion of the Syrian sanctuary on the Janiculum later in this chapter.
- 65 For the statue, see Roulet 1972, no. 123, and works cited. For the inscription on the back of the piece, Bothmer 1960, 97, no. 77. Raeder 1983 argues that the piece was not from Hadrian’s villa (153, no. 3.32), but many still accept the work’s association with this context nonetheless. See, e.g., Grenier 1989, 935–36, n. 11. Recently, a theory has been put forward that it may have been excavated in the Campus Martius. Lollo Barberi 1995, 125, n. 12. Because both arguments rely in full on antiquarian reports, the matter remains open for debate. For the object in the Louvre inventory, Martinez 2004, 708, no. 1469.
- 66 Plin. *HN* 36. 31–32.
- 67 Furtwängler 1910, no 29; Furtwängler 1903, 5.
- 68 *AGR*, no. 333; Lembke 1994, 249, n. 57; Botti 1951.
- 69 There is some debate about its date. For the original publication and view that it is of the Late Period, Gauckler 1912, 187–90; as Ptolemaic, Roulet 1972, no. 156; Manera 2001, no. 10; as Hadrianic, Felletti-Maj 1953–55.
- 70 In Egyptian convention, the negative space between the palms was rendered physically. To viewers unused to this convention, it appears that the sculptures are holding something in the palms. Roman artists, when emulating Egyptian works, certainly interpreted the negative space in this way, and often extended it so that the figures appear to be holding dowels in the hands.
- 71 For discussion of the sanctuary context, Gauckler 1912; Felletti-Maj 1953–55; Goodhue 1975; Goddard 2004, 2008; recent summary in Gee 2010. For description of the depositions, see Goodhue 1975.
- 72 For the findspot and condition of the Dionysus, Gauckler 1912, 183–87; Gauckler 1910, 394–99. For gilding statues (including re-gilding of antiques), see Abbe 2010.
- 73 Gauckler 1912, 187–88.
- 74 Stirling 2004.
- 75 For the Temple of Isis, see earlier in this chapter and Chapter 3; Gasparini 2006 (for the Herculaneum cult site); Ensoli 1993, 1997, 2000 (for the shrine on the Esquiline).
- 76 Roulet 1972, 18–19. This view persists today; see, e.g., Kleiner 2005, 167–68.
- 77 Lembke 1994, 36–50. See also Parlasca 2003, for an exploration of the technique of sunken relief.
- 78 See, e.g., Pitts 2007.
- 79 For a recent survey of hieroglyphic texts in Rome from an Egyptological perspective, Baines and Whitehouse 2005.
- 80 See Parker 2007 for a diachronic survey. For the Egyptian text, see von Erman 1917, no. 4; Grenier 1987b; Malaise 1972b, 203–07; Lembke 1994, 37–39, D55 (with bibliography cited); RICIS 501/0124; Darwall-Smith 1996, 145–50 (with accessible English translation).
- 81 Grenier 1987a, 1987b.
- 82 For Domitian as *dominus et deus*, see, e.g., Suet. *Dom.* 13.2. Yet note also that this characterization is primarily a literary one (Jones 1992, 108–09), not necessarily a matter of Domitian’s own policy or propaganda.
- 83 See especially for the Egyptian content in a Roman context, Grenier 1987b; Lembke 1994, 37–39.
- 84 Gatti 1997.
- 85 For an excellent recent summary of the scholarship on the fragments and bibliography, see Bove 2008; Agnoli 2002, 284–87. On their findspots and history, see Müller 1975.

- 86 For the material from Beneventum, see Müller 1969, 1971 (Italian rep.); Malaise 1972b, 294–305; Pirelli 1997, 2006; Bülow Clausen 2012.
- 87 “...to be rebuilt the cella of Isis and Serapis and likewise vowed the tenth part of the money.” [...*refi*|*ci cella*[...] [*Serapidis e*]t? *Isidi*[s...] [...*de*]cumas a[*rgenti*?] [...*p*]arite[r *soluerunt*]. *AEpigr* 1925, no. 112, RICIS 505/0803.
- 88 See Sirago 1992. CIL 10.685 = RICIS 505/0804: *Verzobio | C Umbrio Eudastro C f | Stel Patrono coloniae | Beneventorum lar|gissimo adque honorifi|centissimo viro| quod is a solo | Canopum pro|priis sumptibus fecerit | collegium Martensium | infraforanum memor | liberalitatis et honorificen|tiae eius patrono prase|tantissimo posuit*. “Verzobius” is a special surname, perhaps invoking a deity sacred to the family. On Eudrastus as a member of the wider community of Beneventum, see Torrelli 2002, 340, n. 153.
- 89 Compare the practices of dedication discussed in Chapter 3 for the Temple of Isis in Pompeii, where individuals also took responsibility for interior spaces.
- 90 For the obelisk, see *Egittomania* II.97; Beneventum, Pirelli 2006, 37, no. 10. For translations, see RICIS 505/0801–2 (with full bibliography); Malaise 1972b, 296–99. Notable past treatments are Müller 1969, 10–11; Iversen 1973; Colin 1993.
- 91 Iversen 1973, 26–27. An alternate reading of the dedicator’s name is Lucilius Rufus, for the hieroglyphic characters can be used for more than one phoneme. Rutilius Lupus is preferred because there is a local family with this name. For discussion of Marcus Rutilius Lupus, a possible descendant and a *praefectus annonae*, see AE 1899, 207 = ILS 5063a; Pirelli 1997, 379. Other authors sometimes read here *Mpups* presuming Middle Egyptian phonetic value. These readings should be rejected. See Iversen 1973 for fullest discussion.
- 92 Compare here the situation with the Praeneste obelisk, which also may have been written first in another language. Bove 2008, 88.
- 93 Iversen 1973.
- 94 See especially Fewster 2002.
- 95 Ripat 2006.
- 96 For the dictionary, papyrus Carlsburg VII, see Iversen 1958; for the practice documents, see Tait 1999.
- 97 P. Oxy. 7.1029; Cotter 1996, 82–84.
- 98 Griffith 1937, 126–27.
- 99 Baines 2008, especially 357. For an example of vital Egyptian culture, Riggs 2005; Klotz 2008.
- 100 Only 4 percent of the papyri are written in hieroglyphs. Ryholt 2005, 142.
- 101 Sternberg-el Hotabi 1994. For the stelae in general, see Gasse 2004. For their magical use, see Ritner 1989.
- 102 RICIS 501/0118.
- 103 See especially Noy 2000, 245–51; 2004; Cristofori 1988, Ricci 1993; for some preliminary thoughts, see Swetnam-Burland 2011.
- 104 See, e.g., clauses 38, 39, 46, 49 of the *Idios Logos*, in Riccobono 1950.
- 105 Plin. *Ep.* 10.5, 10.6, 10.7. On Alexandrian citizenship, see Delia 1991.
- 106 Plin. *HN* 26.3–4.
- 107 *Select Papyri* I, 112 = BGU 2.423.
- 108 See also Noy 2004.
- 109 Van den Horst 1984, Fr. 12.
- 110 Van den Horst 1984, T1–4.
- 111 See Chapter 2. Recently, Benaissa has argued that Hermapion is the same as the author Apion, known to have visited Rome in the early empire. If this supposition is correct, then it is likely that even Hermapion/Apion relied on intermediaries in writing his translation (Benaissa 2013, and especially 116).
- 112 See, e.g., Dueck 2000, 130–44.
- 113 Van den Horst 1984; Iversen 1971.

- 114 Lambrecht 2001; and see Chapter 2.
- 115 Baines 2008.
- 116 Baines 1983.
- 117 For copying, even in sunken relief, see Parlasca 2004. Recent work argues that there was much scope for creativity in making copies or emulations and that even those that appear “accurate” to their originals stand as testaments to the skill and craft of the artist who sculpted the marble or applied pigment to fresco, see, e.g., Gazda 2002; Perry 2005, and bibliography cited. For models in painting, see Clarke 2010; Chapter 3.
- 118 Hartswick 2004, 52–58 and works cited.
- 119 The two pieces are Roulet 1972, nos. 180, 181. For recent discussion and full bibliography, see Hartswick 2004, 130–35, 190, n. 258; Grenier 1989, 20–37, who believes the Roman work was intended to represent Drusilla.
- 120 For etymology, *OED*, s.v. “style, n.,” and for the Latin sense, *OLD* s.v. *stilus* 4b.
- 121 The definitions here are my own. See also, however, the critical discussion of style as applied to art history in Elsner 2003. For a recent style-based approach to ancient art, see Hölscher 2004.
- 122 On the principles and systematic manufacture of Egyptian style, see especially Davis 1989; Robins 1994. On aspects of color symbolism, see Baines 2001; Pinch 2001; Quirke 2001b.
- 123 Elsner 2006, 269–76.
- 124 For catalogue and discussion, see still de Vos 1980; and for consideration of a wide range of motifs in the Augustan context, see Söldner 2004. For the House of Augustus, see illustration and discussion in Iacopi 2008, 29–33. For the “House of the Fruit Orchard,” see Elsner 2006, 278–83. For discussion of nilotic landscapes, see Chapter 4.
- 125 Von Blanckenhagen 1990, 2–3, based on tile and amphora stamps.
- 126 Knauer 1993, 13–18.
- 127 Knauer 1993, 18.
- 128 Söldner 1999, 2004.
- 129 Von Blanckenhagen and Alexander 1990, 69.
- 130 See especially the careful formal analysis of the Boscotrecase paintings in von Blanckenhagen and Alexander 1990, 50–64. For a discussion of the Red Room, see Chevillat 2007.
- 131 For summary of technique and findspots of known examples, see Whitehouse and Painter 1993.
- 132 See Wight and Swetnam-Burland 2010 for previous views and bibliography cited; Söldner 2004, 108–10.
- 133 Whitehouse 1997, 57, no. 58; on the profile and shape of the amphora, Peacock and Williams 1986, 107–08.
- 134 See Adamo Muscettola 1992, cat. 3.2 for description and discussion.
- 135 Fullerton 1990, 24–25, cat. 2.1; Bassani 2008, 128–32.
- 136 CIL 10.849 = RICIS 504/0205. *L. Caecilius Phoebus | posuit | L D D D*
- 137 See Chapter 3 for discussion of other reused materials in this context.
- 138 See Roulet 1972, no. 245; Malaise 1972b, no. 345; Lembke 1994, no. 238; Ensoli 1997 V.10. Lembke 1994 (E.37, E.38) suggests that it may be based on imports from the Iseum.
- 139 The piece was described with the head and shoulder already missing in the late sixteenth century by Sephanus Vinandus Pighius, who attempted where possible to present inscriptions and monuments as he found them. See Curran 2007, 43; Mandowski and Mitchell 1963, 23–35.
- 140 The three inscriptions are bundled as CIL 6.857 / IG 15.1264 / RICIS 501/0123; text appears below, n. 142, 143, 144.
- 141 For recent work on bilingualism, see, e.g., Adams 2003. For bilingualism in Italy, see Leiwo 2002.
- 142 Front face: Φ..... |.....Ν... ΑΝΕΘΗΚΕΝ.

- 143 Left face: *[locus] adsi[g]natus A. Caelio | [et] ... iliano Maximo | [curatoribus] aed[ium] sacr[arum] operumque] pu[blicorum] ded[icatum] |... [k] sept[embris] Quintillo [et] Prisco co[n]s[ulibus]*. My reading here is based on comparison with similar inscriptions from Rome. For the officials as *curatores aedium sacrarum operumque*, cf. CIL 6.855. For “Septembris” as a date (rather than as part of a name), cf. CIL 6.855, 6.856, 6.858, 6.859.
- 144 Right face: ΦΙΔΙΑΣ Κ ΑΜΜΟ | ΦΙΔΙΟΥ ΕΠΟΙΟ, expanded thus in all editions cited earlier: ΦΙΔΙΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΑΜΜΟ[ΝΙΟΣ] [ΑΜΦΟΤΕΡΟΙ] | ΦΙΔΙΟΥ ΕΠΟΙΟ[ΥΝ]. Some technical correction is necessary here. Based on my own autopsy of the piece, “καί” is in fact rendered with the abbreviation kappa. Moreover, ΑΜΦΟΤΕΡΟΙ is reconstructed *ex nihilo*. It is therefore possible, though perhaps improbable, that the name is a supernomen or religious alias, “Phidias otherwise known as Ammonios,” depending on how we read the incomplete verb. For supernomina rendered this way, see a Suskenos referring to himself as Hermes (ICUR 960; Solin 2003, 1470); an individual taking the additional name Euphemus (ICUR 551, Solin 2003, 1476); a woman named Adda taking the name Lampadia (ICUR 1853, Solin 2003, 1478, although fourth century).
- 145 See Parker 2000, especially 74–75, on the prevalence of names related to Egyptian deities; and see still Dow 1937.
- 146 LGPN I (Crete, Cyrenaica, Aegean Islands), Φειδίας 1–9; LGPN II (Attica), Φειδίας 1–46; LGPN IIIa (Peloponnese, western Greece, Magna Graecia, Sicily), Φειδίας, 1–17; LGPN III.b Φειδίας 1–13; LGPN IV (Macedonia, Thrace, Black Sea), Φειδίας 1–2; LGPN V.a (Coastal Asia Minor), 1–7.
- 147 Fidias, CIL 15.5969; T. Flavius Fidias, CIL 15.8096 (Solin 2003, 272); T. Flavius Phidias, 6.8096, funerary inscription dedicated to his son (Phaedrus) from a columbarium on the Via Nomentana.
- 148 See especially Perry 2005, 172–88; Marvin 2008, 213–23.
- 149 IG 3.1308.
- 150 McNelis 2008; Bartman 1992, 147–52.
- 151 Dio Chrys. Or. 12; Perry 2005, 47–48.
- 152 CIL 6.10038.
- 153 Calabi Limentani 1958, 163, no. 89, *ex officina G(ai) Auli Fi(di?)*. The reading is conjectural, but conforms with Latin spellings of the name Fidiās.

2 AEGYPTUS REDACTA: AUGUSTUS’ OBELISKS AND THE SPOILS OF EGYPT

- 1 Suet. Aug. 28.3: *Urbem neque pro maiestate imperii ornatam et inundationibus incendiisque obnoxiam excoluit adeo, ut iure sit gloriatus marmoream se relinquere, quam latericiam accepisset.*
- 2 OLD s.v. *latericius* 1; TLL s.v. *latericius* 1 (e.g., Varro Sat. Men. 524, Caes. B. Civ. 2.10.1, and the description of how to dry brick Vitruvius. De arch. 2.3, 1–4). On the meaning of *marmor*, Schneider 1999.
- 3 Hereafter, I refer to the obelisks by present location. For bibliography on the individual monuments, see later in this chapter.
- 4 CIL 6.701, 6.702: *imp caesar divi fil | Augustus | pontifex maximus | imp xii cos xi trib pot xiv | aegyptio in potestatem | populi romani redacta | soli donum dedit.*
- 5 On the obelisks in general, see Iversen 1968; D’Onofrio 1967; Habachi and Van Siclen 1974; Curran et al. 2009. New approaches focus on object biographies and diachronic history. For catalogue and translations (into Italian), Ciampini 2004. For new approaches, Collins 2000; Parker 2003, 2007; Safran 1993; Schneider 2004, 2005; Sorek 2010; Swetnam-Burland 2010.
- 6 Humphrey 1986, 270.
- 7 See note 159 and discussion in this chapter.
- 8 See Swetnam-Burland 2010.

- 9 On Islamic appropriations of Egyptian materials, Flood 2006; for Egyptian materials in Italian contexts, see Chapter 1.
- 10 For a recent discussion of Egyptian symbolism, see Curran et al. 2009, 13–19, and sources cited; on etymology, Baines 1970; Iversen 1995.
- 11 On the site, Kákosy 1977.
- 12 On the symbolic use of red granite in Egyptian monuments, see Karlhausen 2000; Baines 2000; Kozloff 1992, 142–46.
- 13 On the process, see Engelbach 1922; Arnold 1991, 27–55.
- 14 Breasted 1906, 2.304–36.
- 15 On the inscriptions, see Kitchen 1993, 62–65; on the obelisk and place in Sety I's monumental campaign, see Brand 2000, 133–43, 353–55.
- 16 Translation after Brand 1997, 101, n.6.
- 17 Brand 1997, 104–05; KRI 1.74, 12–14, and 1.73, 11–13.
- 18 For more detailed discussion of the Egyptian history, Swetnam-Burland 2010.
- 19 Arnold 1999, 43.
- 20 See especially on the Roman use and symbolism of obelisks, Schneider 2005; Parker 2007.
- 21 Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 75–77; Cass. Dio. 51.10.
- 22 See, e.g., BMCRE I, nos. 650–55.
- 23 The bibliography on Augustan visual culture is vast. See, e.g., Zanker 1988; Favro 1996; Galinsky 1996; Kleiner 2005; Rehak and Younger 2006; Haselberger 2007.
- 24 See on both cities, Gurval 1995, 67–74; Lange 2009, 96–99.
- 25 On this monument, see Murray and Petsas 1989; Zachos 2003; Lange 2009, 106–11, and sources cited.
- 26 Strabo 17.1.10.
- 27 On the “kingship” of Augustus, see Dundas 2002 and sources cited; for the transition of government, see Capponi 2005.
- 28 Cass. Dio. 51.17.
- 29 On the canals, see Cass. Dio. 51.18.1. For Augustus' temples in Egypt, see Arnold 1999, 230–48; Hölbl 2000, 9–24; Hölbl 2004; O'Neill 2011, 110–29, and sources cited.
- 30 Cass. Dio 51.16.5; Suet. *Aug.* 18.1.: *num et Ptolemaeum inspicere vellet, regem se voluisse ait videre, non mortuos.*
- 31 McKenzie 2007, 79.
- 32 On Augustus' triple triumph, see Beard 2007, 295–305; Gurval 1995, 25–26, and n.8 for ancient sources.
- 33 Cass. Dio. 51.22.4–9. See also Kleiner and Buxton 2008 for the role of children as pledges (*pignora*) in Augustan Rome.
- 34 Suet. *Tib.* 6.
- 35 Suet. *Aug.* 41.
- 36 Prop. 2.1.31–32: *aut canerem Aegyptum et Nilum, cum attractus in urbem | septem captivis debilis ibat aquis.*
- 37 Cass. Dio. 51.22.5.
- 38 In the triumphs of Scourus, there had been a hippopotamus, and under Pompey a rhinoceros. Plin. *HN* 8.71, 8.96.
- 39 Cass. Dio. 51.22.
- 40 Cass. Dio. 51.17.
- 41 Plin. *HN* 36.28.
- 42 Plin. *HN* 9.119–21.
- 43 The temple to the Divine Julius was dedicated August 18, and the curia likely a few days after. On both monuments, see Haselberger 2007, 72–74, and n. 88 for bibliography. For the curia, see, e.g., Tortorici 1993; Noreña in Haselberger, et al. 2002, 99. For the Temple to Julius Caesar, Gros 1996; Noreña in Haselberger, et al. 2002, 103. The dates are recorded in the *fasti*. Haselberger 2007, 75, n. 88; Inscr. Ital. 13.2, 180–81, 190–91, 497. For the Victoria altar, Inscr. Ital. 13.2, 79, 504.
- 44 RG 21.2.

- 45 Cass. Dio 51.22.1–3 (trans. Cary 1980): Ἐπεὶ δὲ ταῦτα δευτέλεσε, τὸ τε Ἀθηναίων τὸ Χαλκιδικὸν ὠνομασμένον καὶ τὸ βουλευτήριον τὸ Ἰουλίειον, τὸ ἐπὶ τῇ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ τιμῇ γενόμενον, καθιέρωσεν. ἐνέστησε δὲ ἐς αὐτὸ τὸ ἄγαλμα τὸ τῆς Νίκης τὸ καὶ νῦν ὄν, δηλῶν, ὡς ἔοικεν ὅτι παρ’αὐτῆς τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐκτίσαστο· ἦν δὲ δὴ τῶν Ταραντίνων, καὶ ἐκεῖθεν ἐς τὴν Ῥώμην κομισθὲν ἐν τε τῷ συνεδρίῳ ἰδρῦθη καὶ Αἰγυπτίοις λαφύροις ἐκοσμήθη, καὶ τοῦτο καὶ τῷ τοῦ Ἰουλίου ἡρώῳ ὁσιωθέντι τότε ὑπῆρξε· συχνὰ γάρ καὶ ἐς ἐκεῖνο ἀνετέθη, καὶ ἕτερα τῷ τε Διὶ τῷ Καπιτωλίῳ καὶ τῇ Ἥρᾳ τῇ τε Ἀθηνᾷ ἱερῶθη, πάντων τῶν πρότερον ἐνταῦθα ἀνακεῖσθαι δοκούντων ἢ καὶ ἔτι κειμένων ἐκ δόγματος τότε καθαιρεθέντων ὡς καὶ μεμιασμένων. καὶ οὕτως ἡ Κλεοπάτρα καίπερ καὶ ἡττηθεῖσα καὶ ἀλοῦσα ἐδοξάσθη, ὅτι τὰ τε κοσμήματα αὐτῆς ἐν τοῖς ἱεροῖς ἡμῶν ἀνάκειται καὶ αὐτὴ ἐν τῷ Ἀφροδίσιῳ χρυσῇ ὁρᾶται.
- 46 Hölscher 1967, 6–12.
- 47 Plin. *HN* 35.28.
- 48 Fracchia 1992.
- 49 Welsby 1998; Adams 1977, 333–82; and especially Torök 2009, 400–26, and sources cited.
- 50 For testimonia and fragments, Hollis 2007, 219–52. For the Qasr Ibrim fragment Anderson, Parsons, and Nisbet 1979. See also on Gallus as a poet Somerville 2009.
- 51 For sources on Gallus’ career, Stickler 2002; for Augustus’ tears upon his death, Suet. *Aug.* 66.2; for the scandal, Cass. Dio. 53.23; for summary of the scandal and the *damnatio memoriae* as response, Flower 2006, 125–29.
- 52 The monument may be the same as that referred to as the Σεβαστή ἀγορά in papyri. On the monument and its relationship to the Forum Augusti, see Herklotz 2007, 125–28; Alföldy 1990; Schneider 2004. For summary of arguments for the Forum Iulium as located in Alexandria as opposed to Nikopolis, McKenzie 2007, 390, n. 58. Much of this discussion is necessarily speculative. The suggestion that this monument was a “Horologium” (Alföldy 2011) is not wholly convincing, based largely on the fact that the monument later had a bronze fitting at the apex, which may have been a Roman addition.
- 53 *iussu imp Caesaris divi f | C Cornelius Cn f Gallus | praef fabr Caesaris divi f | forum Iulium fecit*. Magi 1963, 50.
- 54 The text is CIL 3.14147, IGR 1/11 1293, ILS 8995. For an accessible transliteration and translation of all three texts, see Eide et al. 1996, no. 2.163 (Latin), no. 2.164 (Greek), no. 2.165 (hieroglyphic). For a critical edition, see Hoffmann, Minas-Nerpel, and Pfeiffer 2009, with full bibliography.
- 55 For interpretations, see especially Bresciani 1989; Costabile 2001; Stickler 2002; Minas-Nerpel and Pfeiffer 2010.
- 56 CIL 3.14147: *C. Cornelius Cn. f. Gallus[us] eq[ui]tes Romanus post reges / a Caesare divi f. devictos praefect[us] Alex[andreae] et Aegypti primus defection[is] / Thebaidis intra dies XV, quibus hostem v[icit]...*
- 57 Costabile 2001, 318.
- 58 Torök 2009, 427–42, taking account also of data that reflect the political situation in Meroe at the time. See also for historical treatment of the conflict, Demicheli 1976, 65–95; Jameson 1968.
- 59 Strabo 17.1.53–54.
- 60 Strabo 17.1.53–55.
- 61 Bosanquet 1912; Haynes 1983; Boschung 1993, cat. 12.
- 62 Boschung 1993, cat. 122.
- 63 *RG* 28.
- 64 Strabo 17.1.54, C 820.
- 65 Verhoeven 2008.
- 66 See, for example, Ammianus’ discussion of the many steps in removing, transporting, and re-installing the obelisks, Amm. Marc. 17.4.12–13. Transport involved the invention of ships able to bear their weight. These were massive ships that adapted an Egyptian design to the longer, rougher journey across the Mediterranean Sea. Once in Rome, they were

raised from the Tiber and moved to their sites manually, pushed along stone tracks with massive levers. See Wirsching 2000, 2002a, 2002b, 2010.

- 67 Plin. *HN* 36.68. In discussing the way that the Ptolemies were able to move obelisks (more expensive even than quarrying them), Pliny says that the ships were weighted with blocks of stone from the same mountains, “*e monte eodem*,” so as to precisely calculate a weight exactly double that of the obelisk.
- 68 See Hirt 2010, 176–79, for the army in the management of the quarries; 109–11 for Augustan experimentation, e.g., the changing titles of the officer P. Iuventus Rufus.
- 69 See, e.g., Suet. *Aug.* 28. On the House of Augustus, also Carettoni 1983; Zanker 1988, 50–52; Haselberger 2007, 88–90.
- 70 *P. Oxy.* 2435; as received in the Latin library, Varinlioglu in Haselberger et al. 2002, 68.
- 71 Söldner 1999, 2000, 2004. On the phenomenon in literary and visual arts, see also Bowditch 2011; Clarke 2005; Takács 2011.
- 72 On this point, see especially Clarke 2005, arguing for the domestic arts as revolutionary but not political.
- 73 Verg. *Aen.* 10.495–99; Hor. *Car.* 3.11.21–24; Tib. 1.3.79–80; Ov. *Her.* 14.
- 74 The “Portico of the Danaids” is a modern, not ancient, name. Contemporary poets and later scholiasts referred to the space as the *porticus Phoebi* or *porticos Apollinis Palatini*, Prop. 2.31.1 and Pers. 2.56. For the site and Latin poets, see Balensiefen 1988; for architecture, see Kellum 1985; Quenemoen 2006; for sculptures, see Tomei 1990, 2000. Three black marble herms of *nero antico* found in two locations on the Palatine are the remaining vestiges of the sculptural program, which perhaps included as many as fifty sculptures (for there were fifty daughters of Danaos). For visual renderings of the myth of Danaos, relatively rare but known from late Republican and Augustan contexts, see Keuls 1986.
- 75 On the tomb of Cestius, see especially Ridley 1992; Neudecker 2005; Krause 1999 and works cited. For an interpretative treatment of the monument, see Vout 2003.
- 76 They are not, however, Egyptianizing in character. See discussion in Bastet and de Vos 1979, 28 (no. 5).
- 77 CIL 6.1375 is the duplex inscription from the two statue bases; CIL 6.1374 includes the epitaph and the notice of the tomb’s completion by the freedman Pothus and Lucius Pontius Mela.
- 78 Vout 2003, 180.
- 79 See, e.g., Favro 2005, 251. “Anyone seeing the pyramidal tomb of C. Cestius (ca. 12 BC) immediately thought of Augustus rather than any event in the life of the enshrined.”
- 80 Gregorius Narratio 28. “Concerning the pyramid of Augustus: I saw even the pyramid of Augustus near the Porta Latina, constructed from square stones compacted with iron, which no age was able to pluck out one stone from, even now.” (*De pyramide Augusti. Vidi etiam pyramidem Augusti prope Portam Latinam ex quadris lapidibus ferro compactis constructam, unde adhuc nulla vetustas lapidem unum divellere potuit.*)
- 81 For the “Meta Romuli” as pyramid, see, e.g., Rouillet 1972, cat. 95; for the monument as pyramid and perhaps as tomb of Gallus, Verzár-Bass 1998 (contra Ridley 1992, 14–15).
- 82 On the “Meta Romuli” and “Meta Marcelli,” Ridley 1992, 14–15. See also Gallia in Haselberger et al. 2002, 232.
- 83 Isola Sacra, “tomb 1.” For the “pyramid” from Numidia, see CIL 8.19174. Note that in this case, there is no information about the actual shape of the tomb; it is possible that the “pyramis” differed from Cestius’ tomb in shape and proportion.
- 84 Vout 2003, 200–01.
- 85 The best comparison is the tomb of Eurysaces, which took the form of industrial bread-kneading machines, Petersen 2006. For other monumental Augustan tombs, see the core-formed monument on the Aventine, with a diameter of 40 meters, suggesting also an impressive height (Haselberger et al. 2002, “Sepulchrum: Aventinus,” 222; Eisner 1986, 24–27), or the so-called Casa Tondi, consisting of a cylinder set upon a square base approximately 24 meters per side (Coarelli 1999, 292; Thein in Haselberger et al. 2002, 223, and sources cited).

- 86 CIL 6.1374: *C Cestius L f Pob Epulo pr tr pl | VII vir epulonum*. South-east side: *opus absolutum ex testamento diebus cccxxx | arbitrato Ponti P f Cla Mela heredis et Pothi L*.
- 87 CIL 6.1375 (attested on two statue bases; written in different hands, with slightly different arrangement of the texts by line): *Marcus Valerius Messalla Corvinus | P Rutilius Lupus Lucius Iunius Silanus | L Pontius Mela D Marcus Niger | heredes C Cesti et L Cestius quae ex | parte [sic] ad eum fratris hereditas M Agrippae munere per|venit ex ea pecunia quam | pro suis partibus recepe(runt) | ex venditione attalicorum | quae eis per edictum aedilis | in sepulchrum | C Cesti ex testamento | eius inferre non licuit*.
- 88 PIR 3.V 90.
- 89 PIR 7.R 253.
- 90 PIR 7.S 709 (or perhaps L. Iunius Silanus is this man's son).
- 91 Lucius Cestius, the brother: PIR 2.C6677 (possible epitaph, *NSc* 1923, 368); his son, Lucius Cestius: PIR 2.C668.
- 92 PIR 3.V 457.
- 93 Much of *Dig.* 11.8, *de religiosis et sumptibus funerum*, deals with matters of expense. More specifically, see on funeral and monumental expenses, e.g., *Dig.* 11.7.45, 11.7.6, and 11.7.37.1.
- 94 For examples of “blueprints,” Champlin 1991, 171–73; Wilson Jones 2000, 51–52; Haselberger 1997.
- 95 OLD s.v. *attalicus* 2. See also on the *attalica*, Ridley 1992, 10.
- 96 Plin. *HN* 37.12–16.
- 97 See especially Chioffi 2004, 91–92, for their production in Rome.
- 98 Prop. 2.32.12.
- 99 Prop. 3.18.19.
- 100 *Dig.* 11.14.5 says that to bury personal effects is allowed, but is practiced only among the uneducated.
- 101 See Engels 1998, 167, for these regulations in the Twelve Tables; Zanda 2011, 127–28, for sources on the Lex Julia. (Augustan sumptuary legislation seems not to apply here, targeting rather festival day expenditures.)
- 102 For the pyramid as the “place of ascent,” see Verner 2001, 94; on terminology generally, see Bennett 1966; on the category of monument, see Stadelman 1982, 1263, nn. 1–2.
- 103 The late antique polymath Isidorus explained that the shape surged to a point, just as did a rising flame, and took its name from the Greek πῦρ, for fire. *Isid.* 3.12.6. For both meanings, *TLL* s.v. *pyramis* 1a, as kingly tomb; 1b, as tomb in general (rarer); 2a, b, c, d, e, as geometric shape.
- 104 Hor. *Carm.* 3.30.1–2: *Exegi monumentum aere perennius | regalique situ pyramidum altius...*
- 105 See, e.g., Mart. 10.63.2; Luc. 8.697.
- 106 Strabo 17.1.33; Plin. *HN* 36.75–82, Diod. Sic. 1.63.3 ff. See also Vout 2003, 181, n.18, who shows that the pyramids were considered wonders of the ancient world as early as the second century BCE.
- 107 “They say that the architects of the monuments are more deserving of admiration for their execution; for in bringing their plans to completion, the former called upon their individual souls and their zeal for honor, but the latter only used the wealth which they had inherited from other men.” Diod. Sic. 1.64.12 (Translation, Oldfather 1933): καὶ φασὶ δεῖν θαυμάζειν μᾶλλον τοὺς ἀρχιτέκτονας τῶν ἔργων ἢ τοὺς βασιλεῖς τοὺς παρασχομένους τὰς εἰς ταῦτα χορηγίας· τοὺς μὲν γὰρ ταῖς ἰδίαις ψυχαῖς καὶ ταῖς φιλοτιμίαις, τοὺς δὲ τῷ κληρονομηθέντι πλούτῳ καὶ ταῖς ἀλλορίαις κακουχίαις ἐπὶ τέλος ἀγαγεῖν τὴν προαίρεσιν.
- 108 Let the pyramids in that same province be discussed briefly, a useless and foolish show of the money of kings, since the reason for making them is reported by many, [to be] so that they might not hand money down to their successors or to other rivals standing against them, and so that the people would not be at leisure.” Plin. *HN* 36.75: *dicantur obiter et pyramides in eadem Aegypto, regum pecuniae otiosa ac stulta ostentatio, quippe cum faciendi eas causa a plerisque tradatur, ne pecuniam successoribus aut aemulis insidiantibus praeberent aut ne plebs esset otiosa* (text after Mayhoff 1967–70; note

that many ms. include “odiosa” for “otiosa,” suggesting that the expense was foolish and offensive). See also Carey 2003, 93–95.

109 Hdt. 2.134–35.

110 Plin. *HN* 36.82.

111 Diod. Sic. 1.64.14; Strabo 17.1.33.

112 Hor. *Carm.* 3.30.13–14.

113 See, e.g., Zanker 1988; Hölscher 2004.

114 Platt 2009; Wyler 2006.

115 See discussion, Chapter 1; Elsner 2006.

116 See, e.g., Carey 2003, 86–90; Naas 2002, 366–67. Plin. *HN* 36.64–36.74; Amm. Marc. 17.4.1–17.4.21.

117 Plin. *HN* 36.64 (relying on the text in Mayhoff 1967–70): *trabes ex eo fecere reges quodam certamine, obeliscos vocantes Solis numini sacros. radiorum eius argumentum in effigie est, et ita significatur nomine Aegyptio. primus omnium id instituit Mespheres, qui regnabat in Solis urbe, somnio iussus; hoc ipsum inscriptum in eo, etenim sculpturae illae effigiesque quas videmus Aegyptiae sunt litterae.*

118 Plin. *HN* 36.63.

119 As noted in Eichholz 1962, 50, n. “a.”

120 On obelisks as “speaking” and active meaning-makers, see Parker 2007; Safran 1993.

121 Plin. *HN* 36.72: *ei, qui est in campo, divus Augustus addidit mirabilem usum.*

122 Plin. *HN* 36.70.

123 Plin. *HN* 36.71: *is autem obeliscus quem divus Augustus in circo magno statuit excisus est a rege Psemetnepserphreo, quo regnante Pythagoras in Aegypto fuit, lxxxv pedum et dodrantis praeter basim eiusdem lapidis; is vero, quem in campo Martio, novem pedibus minor, a Sesothide. inscripti ambo rerum naturae interpretationem Aegyptiorum philosophia continent.*

124 Psemet + nepserphreus. Eichholz 1962, 56, n. “b.”

125 Although Psamet II (under the name Psamouthis) appears in the later authors’ quotations of Manetho’s list of Egyptian kings, little substantive information is provided about him. Verbrugghe and Wickersham 1996, Fr. 68 and 69. Diodorus does not include him in his treatment of Egypt’s Late Period.

126 The best (and earliest) manuscript, the Codex Bambergensis, transcribed in the tenth century in Italy, in fact preserves *spemetnepserphreus*. Most editors alter this to *Psemetnepserphreus*, a fair reading, especially because the spelling suggests a scribe fluent in Latin in that it renders unusual phonetics as Latin words, i.e., as *spem-et-nepserphreus*, replacing the unusual prefix *psem* with the accusative of *spes* and linking them with the conjunctive *et*. Later manuscripts preserve other variants of the name, including *semneserteo*. For *apparatus criticus*, see Mayhoff 1967–70, 332. For manuscript tradition, see Reynolds and Marshall 1983, 307–16.

127 Verbrugghe and Wickersham, 1996, Fr. 10; Joseph *Ap.* 1.98, 2.102 (Florentine fragment). See note in Waddell 1964, 102–03. The *apparatus criticus*, Niese 1885–95, reveals a wide range of spelling variants in both Latin and Greek versions of the texts.

128 Plin. *HN* 36.65, though it is wise to note, too, that the manuscript tradition varies widely.

129 See discussion, Chapter 1.

130 See, e.g., Humphrey 1986, 661, n. 236.

131 Plin. *HN Praefatio* 13: *...rerum natura, hoc est via, narratur.*

132 Amm. Marc. 17.4.6 (here and below, after Seyfarth 1978): *in hac urbe inter delubra ingentia, diversasque moles, figmenta Aegyptiorum exprimentes, obeliscos vidimus plures, aliosque iacentes et comminutos, quos antiqui reges bello domitis gentibus, aut prosperitatibus summarum reurum elati, montium venis vel apud extremos orbis incolas perscrutatis excisos et erectos dis superis in religione dicarunt. est autem obeliscus asperrimus lapis in figuram metae cuiusdam sensim ad proceritatem consurgens excelsam, utque radium imitetur, gracilescens paulatim, specie quadrata in verticem productus angustum, manu levigatus artificis. formarum autem innumeras notas, hieroglyphicas appellatas, quas ei undique*

videmus incisas, initialis sapientiae vetus insignivit auctoritas. volucrum enim ferarumque etiam alieni mundi, genera multa sculptentes, ut ad aevi quoque sequentis aetates impetratorum vulgatius perveniret memoria, promissa vel soluta regum vota monstrabant.

- 133 Stolzenberg 2004, 335–36.
- 134 Lambrecht 2001, 91–92, and bibliography cited.
- 135 Although von Erman (1917, 270) believed the translation was authentic but related to a different obelisk, on this point see Lambrecht 2001, 82.
- 136 Rolfe 1972, 327, n.7. Benaissa 2013 argues that Hermapion may be understood as Apion, writing later in the first century CE.
- 137 Lambrecht 2001, 91.
- 138 On the Trinità dei Monti obelisk, see Iversen 1968, 128–41; D’Onofrio 1967, 268–79 and works cited. See also discussion, Chapter 1.
- 139 This phrase, in fact, may correspond to the Egyptian text on the obelisk’s south face, though most of what Hermapion gives as the text of the south face of the obelisk in fact comes from the north. Lambrecht 2001, 79.
- 140 Amm. Marc. 17.4.18: “Ἡλῖος Βασιλεῖ Ῥαμέστη. δεδωρημαί σοι ἀνὰ πᾶσαν οἰκουμένην μετὰ χαρᾶς βασιλεύειν, ὃν Ἡλῖος φιλεῖ. – καὶ Ἀπόλλων κρατερὸς φιλαλήτης υἱὸς Ἡρώωνος, θεογέννητος κτιστῆς τῆς οἰκουμένης, ὃν Ἡλῖος προέκρινεν, ἄλκιμος Ἄρεως Βασιλεὺς Ῥαμεστῆς, ᾧ πᾶσα ὑποτέτακται ἡ γῆ μετὰ ἀλκῆς καὶ θάρσους. Βασιλεὺς Ῥαμεστῆς Ἡλίου παῖς αἰωνόβιος.
- 141 Letta 1988. See further discussion in this chapter.
- 142 “Amm. Marc. 17.4.20: Powerful Apollo, son of Heron, Ramestes king of the *oikoumene*, who protects Egypt, having conquered other peoples.” Ἀπόλλων κρατερὸς υἱὸς Ἡρώωνος Βασιλεὺς οἰκουμένης Ῥαμέστης, ὃς ἐφύλαξεν Αἴγυπτον τοὺς ἄλλοεθνεῖς νικήσας...
- 143 Ciampini 2004, 145.
- 144 Ciampini 2004, 145.
- 145 Plin. *HN* 36.66.
- 146 Plin. *HN* 36.66–70.
- 147 The bronze crabs are today in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Inv. 81.2.1. For the knucklebones, see Humphrey 1986, 549.
- 148 Plin. *HN* 36.102; Noreña in Haselberger et al. 2002, 87.
- 149 Suet. *Iul.* 39.
- 150 Cass. Dio. 49.43.2.
- 151 Humphrey 1986, 91–94; Ciancio Rosetti 1999b.
- 152 Cass. Dio. 50.10.3.
- 153 For its construction, see RG 19. On the *pulvinar*, see Humphrey 1986, 78–83; Ciancio Rosetti 1999a.
- 154 Suet. *Aug.* 43, 45; Suet. *Claud.* 4.
- 155 Humphrey 1986, 80–82.
- 156 Cass. Dio. 53.30.5.
- 157 See, e.g., Haselberger 2007; Kleiner and Buxton 2008, who make a similar point about the historical context of the Ara Pacis.
- 158 For illustration, see de Vos 1980, frontispiece; for discussion, see Söldner 2000; Schneider 2004, n. 76 for full bibliography. For the construction of the mausoleum, see Davies 2000, 51–60.
- 159 On the evidence for the Horologium, see Haselberger 2011; Alföldy 2011; Heslin 2011; Schütz 2011; Hannah 2011. For extended bibliography on interpretations, Swetnam-Burland 2010, n. 8. For the most important arguments, Buchner 1982; and *contra* Schütz 1990; detailed summaries in Rehak and Younger 2006. Against the site as Horologium, Heslin 2007, and for a new interpretation of the Meridian, Albèri Auber 2011–2012.
- 160 E.g., as Flavian, Heslin 2007, as Augustan, Albèri Auber 2011–2012.
- 161 See on the pontificate of Augustus, Bowersock 1990; and for arguments about the relationship of the Meridian to the calendar reforms, bibliography in Haselberger 2011, 69.
- 162 Haselberger 2007, 177–78.

- 163 There is some disagreement on the matter of the fitting for the Piazza del Popolo obelisk, for the ancient account in Ammianus Marcellinus (Amm. Marc. 17.4.14–15) appears to conflate in certain respects the two obelisks in the Circus, brought by Augustus and by Constantine. It is not always altogether clear which monument he refers to. In the view of Curran et al. (2009, 55 and n. 45) it was certainly a globe later replaced by a flame. Humphrey argues that it was a flame (1986, 270, 272), though he notes that even representations of the obelisk are not entirely consistent.
- 164 See note 4.
- 165 OLD s.v. *redigo* 10a, b. The verb *redigere* can be used for the power of people (such as the *patria potestas* of a paterfamilias) or of the state. See particularly Florus Ep. 1.3 (1.9.8), in the context of the extension of the Roman state (by warfare) to include all of Italy (*totam Italiam sub se redegerent*). See also Caes. B. Civ. 3.73; Liv. 5.29.4; Cic. Prov. 32.
- 166 Fasti Praenestini, Inscr. Ital. 13, Fasti Praenestini 2.135: Augustus [– – hoc mense] *Aegyptus in potestatem p(opuli) [R(omani)] [redacta est]*
- 167 Schneider 2004, 165.
- 168 Plin. HN 36.63: *in Africae parte Aegyptio adscripta*.
- 169 Varro Ling 5.10. See also Matern 2002, 20–30.
- 170 Antony: RRC no 496.1–3. Other moneyers in the same year also adopted the motif. L. Mussidius: RRC 509 no. 494, 43 P. Clodius, RRC 505 no. 494, 20, and Matern 2002, M215–18.
- 171 Hor. Carm. saec. 9–12: *alme Sol, curru nitido diem qui | promiss et celas aliusque et idem | nasceris, possis nihil urbe Roma | visere maius*. See on the role of Sol here Miller 2009, 279–81; Hijmans 2004.
- 172 Inscr. Ital. 13. 2.191 9: *E V np Soli Indigeti in colle | quirinale fer(iae) q(uod) e(o) die | C. Caes(ar) c. f. pharsali devicit*. See also the Fasti Allifani Inscr. Ital. 13 2.181; Fasti Antiates Inscr. Ital. 13 2.208.

3 THE SANCTUARY OF ISIS IN POMPEII: DEDICATION AND DEVOTION, MYTH AND RITUAL

- 1 The literature on the sanctuary of Isis is extensive. For recent comprehensive treatments, see Brenk 2007, 2009, 2012; Moormann 2007 and works cited. For documentation of the excavation, finds, and frescos, see Hoffman 1993; Alla ricerca 1992; Sampaolo 2006. On architecture and spatial function, see Hoffmann 1993; Golvin 1994; Blanc, Eristov, and Fincker 2000; Egelhaaf-Gaiser 2000, 185–96. On the paintings, see Sampaolo 1992 and the discussion that follows. On the Egyptian finds, see discussion in Chapter 1. For inscriptions and sculptures, see discussion in this chapter.
- 2 Petersen 2006, 22–56.
- 3 See especially Moormann 2007. For Alexandrian tombs, see, e.g., Venit 1997, 2002.
- 4 The earliest evidence for the veneration of the Egyptian deities in Pompeii comes from an *ostrakon* of debated interpretation, perhaps a dedication to the Egyptian gods (de Caro 2007, 79; cf. *Iside* V.63, 438), but it might as easily be taken to refer to other deities (RICIS II, 608).
- 5 My scope here is limited to the material from the sanctuary. For material related to Isis from domestic and other contexts in Pompeii, see Tran tam Tinh 1964; Malaise 1972b, 263–84; RICIS 504/0201–0219; Petersen 2006, 42–48.
- 6 As Augustan, see Blanc, Eristov, and Fincker 2000. Arguing for later re-urbanization, Pesando 2000.
- 7 The various rooms in the Temple of Isis have long been referred to with names that presume function, e.g., the *ekklesiasterion* and *sacrarium*. Although I use the traditional names here, I stress that they may not accurately characterize room use. On this issue, see, e.g., Allison 2001; Berry 1997; Leach 1997.

- 8 On workshops, Sampaolo 1995; Richardson 2000, especially 37–54, 122–29, 165.
- 9 On the Nilometer and its possible function (no longer characterized as “purgatorium”), see Wild 1981, 44–48.
- 10 See Chapter 1.
- 11 For the finds, see PAH I, 183, PAH I, 188–89; summary in Hoffmann 1993, 106–09.
- 12 For the room finds, see PAH I, 178–81; summary in Hoffman 1993, 95–100.
- 13 For a full description, see Sampaolo 1992, 59–60. A number of the animals have no known divine association.
- 14 Indeed, Plutarch’s account may even deliberately ignore contemporary cult practice to focus on the archaic past. His story of Isis and Osiris is but one part of an intricate argument. See Richter 2001, 2011, 207–29, and sources cited. For other sources for the myth, see Merkelbach 1995, 3–23, 252–66 (on Plutarch).
- 15 Plut., *De Is. et Os.*, 12–20 (355 D–358 E).
- 16 *Curiositate profanorum*, Apul. *Met.* 11.22. For discussion of whether these are hieroglyphs, see Griffiths 1970, 285. For *initiati*, see Apul. *Met.* 11.10; for *sacrati*, Apul. *Met.* 11.24; for *renati*, Apul. *Met.* 11.16, 11.21.
- 17 Apul. *Met.* 11.23.
- 18 See Egelhaaf-Gaisser 2000 on the relationship between sanctuary spaces and Apuleius’ account.
- 19 In the present study, I limit my inquiry to inscriptions and graffiti found in or near the sanctuary complex. CIL 4.2660, CIL 4.1011, 4.787, 10.846, 10.847, 10.848, 10.849, 10.850, 10.851; two were duplicated in other locations, 10.814, 10.815. For studies and catalogues of the epigraphic material from the temple, see especially Tran tam Tinh 1964; Vidman 1969, 226 ff.; Malaise 1972b, 263–84; Mora 1990; RICIS, 504/0201–0211. I omit from my list two individuals sometimes considered to be cult members, Cuspius Pansa and Cn. Helvium Sabinum, the candidates supported by the cult (CIL 4.1011, 4.787). Neither candidate need have been a member of the local cult to garner the group’s support. Similarly, M. Decidius Pilonius Rufus and M. Lucretius Decidianus Rufus may have maintained a relationship with the cult, but their membership has not been proven. On this case, see later in this chapter. It is further possible (per the notes in CIL 4.1011) that Popidius Natalis and Popidius Naeltis are the same individual despite the variation in spelling; Naeltis is written in an admixture of Latin and Greek characters. Finally, the inscription associated with Manilia Chrysa is currently housed in a private collection. It is thought to have come from the Temple of Isis in Pompeii, though to my knowledge it is not noted in the excavator’s diaries. I follow RICIS 504/0206 and others in tentatively including it with the inscriptions documented in the temple.
- 20 CIL 10.846.
- 21 Although Tran tam Tinh 1964 saw Numerius Popidius Ampliatus as freeborn, this view is not widely followed. *Contra* Castrén 1975, 207; Petersen 2006, 25; Franklin 2001, 168–69, for his association with N. Popidius Rufus. It is worth noting that N. Popidius Ampliatus appears in the wax tablets of L. Caecilius Lucundus as a transactor of business (CIL Supplement 4.3340, 83).
- 22 CIL 10.847.
- 23 Recently two other examples of underage children elected to the decurio in Pompeii have come to light. See Cooley and Cooley 2004, G21, G 24. The three-year old from Amiternum: CIL 9.3573. Other examples of child-senators with one parent of lower class origin: CIL 14.2170, CIL 9.1638, CIL 9.3573, CIL 9.1166. See also Tran tam Tinh 1964, 31, n. 9.
- 24 On the Celsii, see Franklin 1980, especially 37–38; Petersen 2006, 48–56.
- 25 CIL 10.921; Castrén 1975, 207.
- 26 CIL 10.850. *suo* here is used as a neuter substantive, rather than an adjective, OLD s.v. *suus* 5b, indicating an expense undertaken. Cf. CIL 10.1444, 10.1445 (from Herculaneum).
- 27 A man with the surname Suavis (though the full name is lost) is attested on CIL 10.921. For the ministry, see Mouritsen 1988, 92–99. Tran Tam Tinh 1964, 102, discussed this

example only briefly, and assumed that it provided documentation of an otherwise unattested brotherhood of Isis that shared the space with the temple.

- 28 On *scholae*, see especially Bollmann 1998, 47–58. On *scholae* in temple contexts, Stambaugh 1978, 588–91. For the *schola* as a part of a larger space, see, e.g., Vitruvius *De arch.* 5.10.4. For other examples of *scholae* given by individuals in Roman towns for community benefit, CIL 10.1453, 5.8801.
- 29 See also Petersen 2006, 54. For *LDDD* as reflective of legislative acts, see especially Camodecca 2003; Pobjoy 2000. For examples from the sanctuaries of Jupiter and Venus, see CIL 10.797, 10.799, 10.800, 10.803, 10.804; cf. 10.801 (*permissu aedilis*). For dedications of uncertain findspot with the phrase, see CIL 10.927, 10.928.
- 30 CIL 10.847.
- 31 E.g., IG XIV 1084; CIL 6.2278, 3.882.
- 32 There is a third, fragmentary graffito, at least partly written by hand and thus not likely an electoral endorsement: *Isi . . . is ubique*. CIL 4.3141, Tran tam Tinh 1964, no. 158.
- 33 CIL 4.1011.
- 34 CIL 4.787. For the case as an exchange, Franklin 1980, 104. Although it is tempting to read this case as a dialogue, there are many problems with making assumptions about the dates of programmata. See Castrén 1975, 113–15.
- 35 *fullones* AE 1913, 96; CIL 4.7164; *pomari(i)* CIL 4.202; *lignari(i)* CIL 4.960; *aurifices* CIL 4.710; *muliones* CIL 4.097; *dormientes* CIL 4.575.
- 36 CIL 4.113, 4.134.
- 37 CIL 4.149, 4.180, 4.183, 4.206, 4.7261d.
- 38 See Petersen 2006, 17–56.
- 39 On the sculptures, with full notes on condition and repair, see Adamo Muscettola 1992; Sampaolo 2006, 98–118.
- 40 CIL 10.815.
- 41 Honorific inscriptions: CIL 10.851, 10.952 (found in Sarno riverbed), 10.789 (Forum), and NSc 1898, 171. See especially Pesando 2000; on the career of M. Lucretius Decidius Rufus, see Franklin 2001, 29–33.
- 42 All six are free-standing cippolino marble herms or plaques with an identical inscription (CIL 10.815). There was another example the precise location of which is not known, given in CIL simply as *in vicinis viae sepulchralis*. See also Pesando 2000.
- 43 Large Theater: CIL 10.833, 10.834, 10.835, 10.837, 10.840; Eumachia: CIL 10.810, 10.811, 10.812; Forum Triangulare: CIL 10.831; cf. CIL 10.953, 10.954, which preserve names only (of unknown location). For the Augustan Forum Triangulare as an ornamental ruin, see Richardson 1988, 67–73; as gymnasium, see D’Arms 1988–89, 54.
- 44 Johnston 1985, 111. In Johnston’s sample, only six cases from Italy are attested before Nerva. On wills and bequests generally, Champlin 1991, 162–68.
- 45 CIL 10.808, 10.809, 10.810.
- 46 For the relationship between Augustan Rome and Pompeii, see D’Arms 1988–89.
- 47 CIL 10.789.
- 48 Orlin 2008.
- 49 CIL 10.851; cf. 10.788, M. Decidius Pilonus Rufus’ rededication in the Forum.
- 50 Franklin 2001, 31–33.
- 51 PAH I, 165 (findspot). For the portrait, see Adamo Muscettola 1992, 3.1; Welch 2007 (attention to dating).
- 52 CIL 10.1814.
- 53 Granino Cecere 1988–89, 132: *Norbanu[s. . .] | Sorex | secundarum | parasitus | D(ianae) N(emorensi) | d(onum) d(edit)*.
- 54 See Bonifacio 1997, nos. 2, 4, 5, 33, 36, 44, 48, 49.
- 55 For the habit of followers of Isis, see Eingartner 1991.
- 56 The inscription documented the gift of an altar to Isis Augusta. “Augusta” was a common epithet of Isis, and does not necessarily indicate that this dates to the Augustan period.
- 57 RICIS 504/0206. For the phrase in local dedicatory context, cf. CIL 10.926, 10.1401 (from Herculaneum); for *ex visu*, 10.929, 10.930, 10.863.

- 58 So, for example, both L. Caecilius Phoebus and M. Decidius Pilonius Rufus describe the dedication as a placement, *posuit/reposuit* (CIL 10.849, 10.851), consistent with honorific dedications throughout the city.
- 59 For the language used in acts of dedication and the complex situation of cult structures built at private expense, see especially Bodel 2009.
- 60 See Stewart 2003, 261–67. Note, in fact, that the ears of the acrolith of Isis found in the ekklesiasterion were pierced, an example of a sculpture dressed or adorned.
- 61 CIL 9.3513, dated by consular year to 58 BCE. For translation and discussion, see Gordon 1983, 94–95.
- 62 Delivorrias et al. 1984, 76–77, for the Anadyomene type.
- 63 See Mart. Ep. 4.44 on Venus and Bacchus as patrons of Pompeii. For the Venus temple, see Carrol 2010; Markus 2009.
- 64 For this sculpture as nodding to traditions that conflate Isis and Venus, Adamo Muscettola 1992, 70, n. 5. For Isis-Aphrodite (Anadyomene), see, e.g., Jentel 1984, no. 85; cf. AGR no. 208, AGR no. 211. For instances in which Venus Anadyomene and Isis were found together in domestic shrines, *Iside* V.69, V.70; Dwyer 1982, 124 and fig. 79.
- 65 On the extramural sanctuary, see D'Alessio 2009, 90–97 and works cited; for shrines with Bacchus, see Bassani 2008, 86–87; Swetnam-Burland 2000.
- 66 See also Adamo Muscettola 1993, 3, 70.
- 67 For Dionysus as Osiris, see Hdt. 2.42; Diod. Sic. 1.25.1. Sometimes Osiris is, like Bacchus, described as wearing crowns of flowers, e.g., Tib. 1.7.43–48. For discussion of the iconography of Osiris, see especially Clerc and Leclant 1994.
- 68 See PAH I.164–65.
- 69 For condition and pigment on the statue of Bacchus, PAH I.184. For comparison, see the Venus found in house II 4, 6 (Museo Archaeologico Nazionale di Napoli inv. 152798), gilded to include jewelry and a bikini.
- 70 See Abbe 2010; Liverani 2010.
- 71 CIL 10.848.
- 72 Piranesi 1804–07, vol. II, Pl. LXXII.
- 73 The first mythological painting was unearthed in the presence of the king on November 23, 1765 (PAH I. 181). On January 4, 1766, the excavators found the acrolith of Isis, apparently in a stratum somewhat above floor level (PAH I.163). The painting of Io, Argus, and Mercury was discovered many months later, on April 26, 1766 (PAH I.187).
- 74 For the view that the annexation predated the reconstructions, based on autopsy of the brickwork, see Blanc, Existov, and Fincker 2000. For the opposite view, based on epigraphy, see Pesando 2000.
- 75 *NSc* 1885, 317–21: *M. Servilius Quartus alam expolit et ... | ... et quae intus posita sunt Dia(nae)*. . . “Marcus Servilius Quartus refined the ala and . . . the things which were placed inside to Diana.” Granino Cecere (1988–89, 141) argues that the missing section read “and painted” or “and decorated” (*et exornavit / pinxit*). The materials found in the room were all dedicated by other members of the community, apparently a troupe of actors, which suggests that the gift is the space and decoration, rather than the room’s contents. See also Bombardi 2000.
- 76 It is worth noting that there may or may not have been a third painting. There are other contexts – including the so-called Augustaleum of Herculaneum, which also likely served as a semi-public meeting hall – that paired two paintings facing each other. In domestic settings, however, three paintings are known. For full review of previous literature on the two ekklesiasterion paintings, see Balch 2008, 64–71, 148–56. For discussion of narrative programs and mythological ensembles, see Thompson 1960. For catalogue, Bergmann 1994; Bergmann 1996; Clarke 1991, 232–34; Leach 2004, 270–86; Lorenz 2005, 2008.
- 77 For discussion of Ovid and painting, on Narcissus, see Squire 2009; see on Narcissus, Elsner 2007, 132–76; Valladares 2011. On Polyphemus and Galatea, see Colpo and Salvadori 2010. On Perseus and Andromeda, see Ghedini 2010.
- 78 For survey of the literary material, see Yalouris 1990, 661–64; Dowden 1989, 116–45; Mitchell 2001.

- 79 Hdt. 2.41; cf. Diod. Sic. 1.24.8.
- 80 Davison 1989.
- 81 Callim. *Epigr.* 58: Ἰνᾶχιδος ἔστυγχευ ἐν Ἰσιδος.
- 82 The Suda reports the title as the Ἰοῦς ἀφιξις, but we know nothing more; that it treated Io's arrival in Egypt and confrontation with Isis is supposition. See <http://www.stoa.org/sol-entries/kappa/227> = Adler 227.
- 83 Lycoph. *Alex.* 1292: τὴν βοῶπιον ταυροπαρθενον κόρην; for the Io story, 1291–95.
- 84 See especially West 1984a, 1984b; Griffiths 1986. West takes “bull-maid” as reference to Callimachus, Herodotus, and perhaps even to a lost play by Sophocles; Griffiths argues that the use of “bull-maid” refers to Io as mother of Epaphus, also drawing out connections with Isis and Apis.
- 85 Stephens 2003.
- 86 P. Oxy 11.130, column 3.64 (trans. Grenfell and Hunt 1915, 201): [ἐ]ν Μεν[[ι]οῦξ] Ἰοῦς ἢ κτιζέται π[...]. [.]μερεῖ[α]ς προκᾶθημ[ε]ν[η]ν. The fresco was first connected with the papyrus by Grenier 1994. Another line from this same text is read by some as Io-Sothis and by others as Isis-Sothis, e.g., 11.130, column 7. 143–44, Ἰοῖ | Σῶθι or Ἰσι | Σῶθι. For bibliography and apparatus criticus, see Totti 1985, no. 20.
- 87 Grenier 1994.
- 88 Cf. Hunt and Grenfell 1915, 212, n. 64.
- 89 Totti 1985, no. 36.
- 90 See Hollis 2007, 60–68.
- 91 Verg. *Aen.* 7.789–92: *at levem clipeum sublatis cornibus Io | auro insignibat, iam saetis obsita, iam bos, | argumentum ingens, et custos virginis Argus | caelataque amnem fundens pater Inachus urna.* See also Gale 1997.
- 92 Prop. 1.3.19–20: *sed sic intentis haerebam fixus ocellis, | Argus ut ignotis cornibus Inachidos*
- 93 Prop. 2.33, especially 11–15.
- 94 Ov. *Met.* 1.588–747; Ov. *Her.* 14.85–92.
- 95 For Isis named Inachis, see, e.g., Prop. 2.33.4, Ov. *Ars.* 3.464; Ov. *Met.* 9.686–88; Ov. *Fast.* 1.1.454. For the epithets, see also Bricault 1996, 35, 83.
- 96 For a survey of the visual material on Io, Yalouris 1986, 1990. Although the majority of the Roman renderings of the myth come from this fresco series, there are also a small number of heads of Io in the round. See Freyer-Schauenberg 1983.
- 97 Plin. *HN* 35.130–32.
- 98 See especially Yalouris 1990, no. 44, which includes a seated Io, standing Argus, and looming rock. The theme appears in a number of south Italian production centers, including Campania, Lucania, and Apulia (see, e.g., Yalouris 1990, nos. 57–60).
- 99 For expression of this view, see Yalouris 1986, no. 25, and works cited. For a formal analysis of the type and arguments against the lost painting as authoritative original, see Wesenberg 1988. For recent work on Kopienkritik, see, e.g., Gazda 2002; Perry 2005, and works cited. For recent discussions of “replications” in fresco media, see especially Clarke 2008, 2010; Bragantini 2004; Bergmann 1995.
- 100 See Wesenberg 1988; Bergmann 1995; Barringer 1994, for an exploration of the type in the Macellum; for brief exploration of the type in Pompeii, see Lorenz 2008, 229–230, 324–26, 338–40.
- 101 Yalouris 1986, no. 52. For illustration, see Coarelli 1984, 151. The figures are similar to paintings (such as that in the Macellum), a seated Io and a standing heroic Argus.
- 102 Adamo Muscettola 1992, 55.
- 103 About twenty percent of Pompeii's literary graffiti were deliberately adapted by those who transcribed them. See, e.g., CIL 4.1520 for a sampling of Ovid and Propertius or the well-known parody of the first lines of the Aeneid, CIL 4.9131. See Gigante 1979, 185–201; Milnor 2009, 2014; Wachter 1998. For a list of literary graffiti in Pompeii, see Cooley and Cooley 2004, Appendix 2. On graffiti as conversations, see Benefiel 2010a, 2010b.
- 104 Valladares 2011.
- 105 Pero and Micon in the House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto V 4.a, PPM 3.1000–08, in IX 2.5, PPM 3.405–06. For interpretation of the text and image in concert, see, e.g., Milnor

- 2005, 98–102; Valladares 2011, 386–89; Elsner 2007, 155. That the type was well known is also illustrated by its adaptation to (or perhaps from) other media. For two small ceramic statuettes of the type, see di Gioia 2006, 1.1, 1.2
- 106 See for brief discussion, Clarke 1991, 176–80, and works cited.
- 107 For illustration, see DAI Inst Neg. 53.587, PPM 3.835. The painting is preserved in a sketch made at the time of excavation. For the location of the graffito, see CIL 4.4133, and for more on this case, Swetnam-Burland 2015 (forthcoming).
- 108 For Syrinx, Ov. *Met.* 1.687–713. See also Murgatroyd 2001, which explores how the device of the embedded narrative, the story within story, brought to the fore shifts in authorial voice that emphasize that Io's freedom is bought by an act of violent death.
- 109 For the appeal of the pregnant moment, see, e.g., Bergmann 1996.
- 110 Ov. *Met.* 1.589–90 (after Tarrant 2004): *beatum | nescioquem factura toro.*
- 111 Ov. *Met.* 1.658–60: *at tibi ignarus thalamos taedasque parabam, | spesque fuit generi mihi prima, secunda nepotum; | de grege nunc tibi vir et de grege natus habendus.* See also for Ovid's play on the "flock" as a worse fate than a loss of elite status, Barchiesi 2005, 221.
- 112 "Even as a cow, she is beautiful." Ov. *Met.* 1.612: *bos quoque formosa est.* For her return to her family, see Ov. *Met.* 1.639–63.
- 113 "In place of a *torus*, the unlucky girl lies on earth not ever having grass, and drinks limey water." Ov. *Met.* 1.633–34: *proque toro terrae non semper gramen habenti | incubat infelix limosaque flumina potat.* For the grass described as bitter, Ov. *Met.* 1.632.
- 114 Ov. *Met.* 1.664–66: *talia maerentem stellatus summovet Argus | ereptamque patri diversa in pascua natam | abstrahit.*
- 115 Verg. *Aen.* 7.790 (above, n. 90) For Argus as the *custos Iunonius*, Ov. *Met.* 1.678. For *custos* generally, compare OLD s.v. *custos*, 1 a, b, c, and 3a.
- 116 *Arestoridae*, Ov. *Met.* 1.624; Andersen 1996, 210, says the epithet was borrowed deliberately from Apollonios of Rhodes, 1.111 and 1.325.
- 117 Paus. 2.16.4.
- 118 As, for example, the poet might describe a grove using language evocative of the amphitheater. Hinds 2002; see also Segal 1969.
- 119 Ov. *Met.* 1.678–81: ... 'at tu | quisquis es, hoc poteras mecum considerare saxo,' | Argus ait; 'neque enim percori fecundior ullo | herba loco est, aptamque vides pastoribus umbram.'
- 120 Ov. *Met.* 1.718–19: *saxoque cruentum | deicit et maculat praeruptam sanguine rupem.*
- 121 For the phrase *deicere saxo*, cf., Livy 25.7.13; Lucr. 3.1016; Hor. *Sat.* 1.6.39.
- 122 OLD s.v. *maculo* 1, 3.
- 123 Ov. *Met.* 1.720–21: *Arge, iaces, quodque in tot lumina lumen habebas | extinctum est centumque oculos nox occupat una.*
- 124 For the wordplay, see Barchiesi 2005, 227. On Ovid's use of inscriptions, see Ramsby 2007.
- 125 For the Ptolemaic connections, see Sampaolo 2006, 1.63. As the painting relates to Isiac cult, see Bianchi 2007; Grenier 1994; Balch 2003; Brenk 2007.
- 126 Grenier 1994.
- 127 Bianchi 2007.
- 128 For the iconography of the personified Nile, see Chapter 4.
- 129 Brenk 2007.
- 130 Balch 2003; Balch 2008 64–71, 148–56.
- 131 Ov. *Met.* 1.728–33: *ultimus immenso restabas, Nile, labori; | quem simul ac tetigit, positisque in margine ripae | procubuit genibus resupinoque ardua collo; | quos potuit solos, tollens ad sidera vultus | et gemitu et lacrimis et luctuono mugitu | cum Iove visa queri finemque orare malorum.*
- 132 See, e.g., Bömer 1969, 216.
- 133 Ov. *Met.* 1.747: *nunc dea linigera colitur celeberrima turba.*
- 134 Ov. *Met.* 1.747–50.
- 135 Andersen 1996, 221; elsewhere by Ovid, e.g., *Am.* 2.2.25.
- 136 *Narrationes* 1.19–21 (text after Magnus 1914, title, 631; synopsis, 635–36): *Io supradicta, in Isidem: Io supradicta cum furiis exagitata orbem terrarum percucurrisset, novissime in*

Aegyptum delata placata Iunone a Iove in pristinam formam regressa est. Isidis deae nomen accepit linigeraque est appellata.

- 137 Hyginus *Fabulae* 145.17–19: *inde in Aegyptum, ubi parit Epaphum. Iovis cum sciret suapte propter opera tot eam aerumnas tulisse, formam suam ei propriam deamque Aegyptiorum esse fecit, quae Isis nuncupatur.*
- 138 Apollodorus 2.39: δὲ ἄγαλμα Δήμετρος ἦν ἐκάλεσαν Ἴσιν Αἰγύπτιοι, καὶ τὴν ἰὼ Ἴσιν ὁμοίως προσηγόρευσαν.
- 139 Vitruv. I.7.1. On the functions of Roman temples, see Stambaugh 1978.
- 140 Grenier 1994.
- 141 Bianchi 2007.
- 142 Brenk 2007.

4 IMAGES OF EGYPT: LAND AT THE LIMIT OF BELIEF

- 1 Hdt. 2.35–36, Egypt with upside-down gender roles; 2.66–67, Egyptians and the veneration of cats.
- 2 See especially Vasunia 2001 and works cited; see, e.g., Burstein 1996, for summary of Greek authors, historians, and geographers. For an alternate view, see Gruen 2011, 76–111.
- 3 See especially Moyer 2011 for the relationship between Greek authors and their Egyptian subjects; see Stephens 2003 for new approaches to literature produced in Egypt.
- 4 For surveys of the literature, see Meyer 1981; Sonnabend 1986; Smelik and Hemelrijk 1984. More recently, Versluys 2002, 422–34; Nimis 2004; Manolaraki 2012.
- 5 On Tibullus, see, e.g., Söldner 2000; Bowditch 2011 and works cited. For Plutarch, see, e.g., Alston 1996; Richter 2001, 2011, 207–229 and works cited.
- 6 Amm. Marc. 22.15.1–31. Ammianus Marcellinus was not the very last author to describe Egypt or the Nile. See, e.g., Merrills 2005, 79–87, for Orosius’ characterization of the Nile and his relationship with earlier geographical sources.
- 7 See, for example, references to Homer at Amm. Marc. 22.15.3, to Herodotus at Amm. Marc. 22.15.28, to Juba at Amm. Marc. 22.15.8; and allusions or adaptations from other authors abound, e.g., Amm. Marc. 22.1.4, perhaps drawing on Luc. 10.295–6 and Claud. de Nilo (carm. min. 28), 11–2 (de Jonge et al. 1995, 260), or 22.15.9, drawing on Plin. *HN* 5.53–4 (de Jonge et al. 1995, 264).
- 8 Amm. Marc. 22.15.4: *verum quoniam fabulantes poetae variantes geographi in diversa latentem notitiam scindunt, opiniones eorum veritati confines, ut arbitror, expedit paucis.*
- 9 Ammianus’ description of the Egyptians: Amm. Marc. 22.16.23; Isaac 2004, 365–68. Ironically, those opinions he sets forth as his own are likely also adapted from his sources. de Jonge et al. 1995, 261. On allusion in Ammianus Marcellinus, see Kelly 2008.
- 10 Plin. *HN* 8.95 on hippopotami, drawing on Aristotle and, through him, Herodotus. See Bona 1991, 121–23.
- 11 See Isaac 2004, 352–70.
- 12 See Gruen 2011, 76–111.
- 13 For studies of the “Nile type” across media, see Jentel 1992; Bonacasa 1963, 492–93. For nilotic landscapes, see Whitehouse 1980; Versluys 2002. For sculpture, see Adriani 1961, 52–58; Klementa 1993, 9–51; Kákosy 1982; Swetnam-Burland 2009. For gems, see Platz-Horster 1992. For coins, see Bakhoun 1999, 87–105. For late-antique art, see Thomas 2000, 63–67.
- 14 Authors alternately refer to the denizens of Egypt in these scenes as “dwarves” (reflecting the fact that often their physiognomy appears similar to achondroplastic dwarfism) or “pygmies” (indicating simply that they are small, following some ancient authors who refer to them as *pygmaioi*). On sexual activity, see Clarke 2007a; Clarke 2007b, 87–107; Versluys 2002; Versluys et al. 2007 and bibliography cited.
- 15 E.g., for large-scale scenes, for the *praedia* of Julia Felix, see Versluys 2002, no. 038; on the “Casa dei Pigmei,” IX 5, 9, Versluys 2002, no. 062; for the frieze from the Temple of Apollo (now lost), see Versluys 2002, no. 053. For narrative compositions, see, e.g., “House

- of Maius Castricius,” VII 16/17, 34, Versluys 2002, no. 054; “House of the Doctor” VIII 5, 24, see Versluys 2002, no. 059; Clarke 2007b, 100–05.
- 16 See Versluys 2002, especially 285–93, for evolution and distribution of the motif.
 - 17 See especially Versluys 2002, 437.
 - 18 Clarke 2007a, 2007b, 87–107.
 - 19 For documentation, Sampaolo 1992, cat. 1.2.
 - 20 See for *venire* used as a sexual term, Adams 1982, 175–77.
 - 21 Attested most often in the first person plural. For comparanda, CIL 4.10065a, 4.6697, 4.9849, among others; *hoc* stands for *huc*, common in Pompeian orthography. The phrase is known in roughly nine locations in Pompeii but also is attested in Herculaneum and other Campanian towns and is even known from a graffito in Gaul. See also Keegan 2011, n. 14, 15.
 - 22 Before the work of Miguel John Versluys (2002, 248–59), insufficient attention was paid to the physical context in which scenes were displayed.
 - 23 See on these points Tybout 2003; in support of this view of dating, see Whitehouse 1980, 3–4, 77–81.
 - 24 Versluys 2002, cat. 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, Whitehouse 1980, R16, M41, M42.
 - 25 Plin. *NH* 36.41–42.
 - 26 Suet. *Ner.* 45–46. On the porticus theater, and its displays: Gleason 1994; Kuttner 1999.
 - 27 Hughes 2009.
 - 28 Jentel 1988.
 - 29 Jentel 1988, 1993. The Euthenia motif is predominantly numismatic but is also known in a small number of sculptures and textiles from Egypt.
 - 30 See especially Campbell 2012; Jones 2002; Murphy 2004, 138–48; Taylor 2009.
 - 31 Klementa 1993, 43–45. For emulation and replication in Roman art, see Bartman 1992; Bergmann 1995; Gazda 1995, 2002; Marvin 2002, 2008; Perry 2005; Hallett 2005a; Trimble and Elsner 2006. For viewer responses to “copies” in context, see, e.g., Bartman 1988; Retzlaff 2007.
 - 32 In brief, these positions can be summarized as follows: for the Nile as Alexandrian, see, e.g., Adriani 1961, 52 ff.; Bonacasa 1963; as Alexandrian but with the *pecheis* a Roman addition, see, e.g., Gais 1978; Bakhoum 1999, 89–91; as Roman, postulated to be that displayed by Vespasian in the Templum Pacis, see Ostrowski 1991, 22–23; Lembke 1994; Le Gall 1953a, b; Klementa 1993, 43–44.
 - 33 Imperial contexts, for example, include the Nile and Tiber in Hadrian’s Villa, the Nile (and its pendant, a Tigris, Tiber, or other river) now on the Piazza del Campidoglio sometimes associated with the Serapeum of Hadrian (Taylor 2004; Klementa 1993, A8), and the Nile from “Domitian’s Villa” (Klementa 1993, A5).
 - 34 Alexandria, Maritime Museum SCA 842; Goddio and Clauss 2008, 80–83, cat. 29.
 - 35 CIL 2²⁵, no. 340: *T. Flavius V(ic)tor colleg(io) (S)illychiniario(ru)m Prati Novi d(onum dedit)*, found circa 5 kilometers from the ancient site of Igabrum. See Klementa 1993, A7; Blanco-Freijero 1971. Others see the statue as Euthenia. RICIS 602/0402.
 - 36 For a summary of recent work and an investigation of internal modes of perspective, see Hinterhöller 2009; as relating to *geographia* and *chorographia*, see Ferrari 1999; as relating to the cult of Isis, see Meyboom 1995; as reflecting Ptolemaic history, see Steinmeyer-Schareika 1978; Coarelli 1990.
 - 37 See on post-antique history Whitehouse 1976, 5–10; La Malfa 2003.
 - 38 For summary of views on dating, see Meyboom 1995, 16–20; Panayides 1994, 31–32. The most recent publication of the Maresha paintings is Jacobson 2007.
 - 39 For discussion of the labels from Maresha arguing for earlier dates, see Phillips 1962, 211–16; Meyboom 1995 44–50; arguing for later date, see Panayides 1994.
 - 40 Molholt 2011.
 - 41 See especially Pinci 2001. As Iseum, see Gatti 2004. There are epigraphic testimonia of the cult in Praeneste, though they are later in date. These include the obelisk (See Chapter 1) and two second century CE inscriptions, RICIS 503/0601, RICIS 503/0602.
 - 42 Gatti 2004.

- 43 Both “caves” are aligned to the same axis, suggesting the two are roughly contemporary. Yet the shape of the apse in which the Nile Mosaic was set is modeled roughly upon that of the Antro degli Sorti, and thus it is also possible that it was created later.
- 44 Meyboom 1977; for a review of past scholarship and exposition, see Pinci 2001, 33–43.
- 45 On the Fish Mosaic, see catalogue treatments of its place in the genre, de Puma 1969, no. 15; Meyboom 1977; Meyboom 1995; for discussion as meaningful pendant, especially Ferarri 1999; Panayides 1994.
- 46 See especially Ferrari 1999.
- 47 On the sculptural program, see Pensabene 2010 and works cited.
- 48 Nile, Vatican Museums (Museo Chiaramonte 2300). For full bibliography on the Nile, see Klementa 1993, A14; Lembke 1994, 214–16; Swetnam-Burland 2009, n. 6; Whitehouse 1980, 193–99. The Nile is heavily restored. For detailed notes on condition, see Swetnam-Burland 2009, n. 3. On discovery of the Nile, see Brummer 1970, 192, n. 23, recorded in Fulvio, *Antiquitates Urbis*, Rome, 1527, folio XCIIba (as cited by Brummer).
- 49 Often referred to in secondary literature as “cubits,” but in ancient texts alternately πήχεις (hereafter, *pecheis*), *liberi* or παιδία. For literary descriptions of artworks representing the Nile, see Plin. *HN* 36.58; Florus 2.13.88; Prop. 2.1.31–34; Lucian *Rhaet Praec.* 26–30; Amp. *Lib. Mem* 8.24; Phil. *Imag* 1.5 (on which, see the discussion that follows).
- 50 See Le Gall 1944 and summary bibliography in Haskell and Penney 1981, no. 37; Bober and Rubinstein 1986, no. 66.
- 51 See, e.g., Mainardi 1989; Johns 1998, 171–94. For post-antique influence of the sculptures, see Schama 1995, 282–89.
- 52 For the pairing, see especially Klementa 1993, 221–23; Lembke 1994, 26–27.
- 53 Bartman 1988.
- 54 In this, I agree broadly speaking with Klementa 1993, 26–27, who sees the work as Hadrianic. Most examples appear to cluster between 100 and 150 CE: Trajanic Niles, e.g., on the Piazza del Campidoglio, Klementa 1993, cat. A7–A11; Hadrianic, e.g., from Hadrian’s Villa, Klementa 1993, A12–17. For the view that the personification is Flavian but the base – carved at an indeterminate point afterward – is second century, see Whitehouse 1980, R1 193–99. Any date should be considered with caution, given the extensive reconstructions.
- 55 The Iseum Campense is a monument attested largely in literary sources and on the marble plan. The nature of the evidence has led to many, at times conflicting, interpretations of the monument. See especially Lembke 1994; Malaise 1972a, 187–214; Rouillet 1972, 23–35. For focus on topographic setting, see Coarelli 1990; Richardson 1992, 211–12. Recent work includes Alfano 1992b; Darwall-Smith 1996, 142–45; Brenk 1999, 2003; Sist 1997; Versluis 1997.
- 56 Lembke 1994, 25, 50–58. For personifications of *Oceanus*, see Lembke 1994, 218–19.
- 57 Described in 1523 by an anonymous Venetian recording a trip to Rome. Brummer 1970, appendix 1.3: “In mezzo al giardino vi sono due grandissimi uomini di marmo, l’uno dirimpetto all’altro, due volte più di naturale, i quali giacciono in atto di dormire. L’uno è il Tevere, l’altro è il Nilo, figure antiquissime; e da questi escono due bellissime fontane.”
- 58 Gatti 1993; Richardson 1992, 340–41.
- 59 A temple to Isis was vowed by the triumvirs (Cass. Dio 53.2.4), though we do not know its planned location (or if the project was completed). The Iseum and Serapaeum Campense was built by Domitian after the fire of 80 CE (Chron. 146).
- 60 Phil. *Imag* 1.5 Περί τον Νεῖλον οἱ Πήχεις ἀθρύρουσι παιδία ξύμμετρα τῷ ὀνόματι, καὶ ὁ Νεῖλος αὐτοῖς ὑπεργάνυται τὰ τε ἄλλα καὶ ὅτι κηρύττουσιν αὐτόν, ὅσος Αἰγυπτίοις προεχύθη. προσάγεται γοῦν καὶ οἷον ἔρχεται αὐτῷ ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος βρέφη ἀπαλὰ καὶ μειδιῶντα, μετέχριν δὲ οἶμαι τι αὐτὰ καὶ τοῦ λαλοῦ. καὶ οἱ μὲν τοῖς ὤμοις αὐτοῦ ἐφιζάνουσιν, οἱ δὲ τῶν πλοκάμων ἐκκρέμανται, οἱ δὲ τῇ ἀγκάλῃ ἐγκαθεύδουσιν, οἱ δὲ κωμάζουσιν ἐπὶ τοῦ στέρνου. ὁ δὲ ἀναδίδωσιν αὐτοῖς ἄνθη τὰ μὲν ἀπὸ τοῦ κόλπου, τὰ δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς ἀγκάλης, ὡς στεφάνους τε ἀπ’ αὐτῶν διαπκλέκοιεν καὶ καθεύδοιεν ἐπὶ τῶν ἀνθέων ἱεροὶ καὶ εὐώδεις. καὶ ἐπαναβαίνουνσιν ἄλλο ἄλλω τὰ παιδία σείστροις ἅμα · ταυτὶ γὰρ ἔναυλα ἐκείνῳ τῷ ὕδατι. κροκόδειλοι μὲν οὖν οἱ ποτάμιοι τῶν ἵππων, οὓς τῷ Νεῖλῳ

τινὲς προσφράγουσιν, ἀπόκεινται νῦν ἐν βαθείᾳ τῇ δίνῃ, μὴ δέος τοῖς παιδίοις ἐμπέσοι. γεωργίας δὲ καὶ ναυτιλίας σύμβολα δηλοῖ τὸν Νεῖλον ἐκ τοιοῦδε, ὧ παῖ, λόγου· Νεῖλος Αἰγυπτὸν πλωτὴν ἐργασάμενος εὐκάρπῳ τῇ γῇ χρῆσθαι δίδωσιν ὑπὸ τῶν πεδίων ἐκποθεῖς, ἐν Αἰθιοπία δὲ, ὅθεν ἄρχεται, ταμίας αὐτῷ δαίμων ἐφέστηκεν, ὅφ' οὐ πέμπεται ταῖς ὥραις σύμμετρος. γέγραπται δὲ οὐρανομήκης ἐπινοῆσαι καὶ τὸν πόδα <ἐπ>έχει ταῖς πηγαῖς οἶον Ποσειδῶν προσνεύων. εἰς τοῦτον ὁ ποταμός βλέπει καὶ αἰτεῖ τὰ βρέφη αὐτῷ πολλὰ εἶναι.

- 61 Moffitt 1997.
- 62 Hijmans, Harris, and Stewart 2007.
- 63 Bonneau 1964, 130 ff.
- 64 Lucian, *Rhet. Praec.* 17–30: Ἐθέλω δέ σοι πρῶτον ὥσπερ ὁ Κέβης ἐκεῖνος εἰκόνα γραψάμενος τῷ λόγῳ ἐκατέραν ἐπιδείξαι τὴν ὁδόν. ... εἴ που τὸν Νεῖλον εἶδες γραφῇ μεμιμημένον, αὐτὸν μὲν κείμενον ἐπὶ κροκοδείλου τινὸς ἢ ἵππου τοῦ ποταμίου, οἷοι πολλοὶ ἐν αὐτῷ, μικρὰ δὲ τινὰ παιδία περὶ αὐτὸν παίζοντα – πῆχεις δὲ αὐτοὺς οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι καλοῦσι – τοιοῦτοι περὶ καὶ τὴν Ῥητορικὴν οἱ ἔπαινοι.
- 65 On Cebes (or Kebes), Suda K1215; Fitzgerald and White 1983.
- 66 Plin. *HN* 36.58: *invenit eadem Aegyptus in Aethiopia quem vocant basaniten, ferrei coloris atque duritiae, unde et nomen ei dedit. numquam hic maior repertus est quam in templo Pacis ab imperatore Vespasiano Augusto dicatus argumento Nili, sedecim liberis circa ludentibus, per quos totidem cubita summi incrementi augentis se amnis eius intelleguntur.*
- 67 For a list artworks in the Templum Pacis from literary evidence, see Darwall-Smith 1996, 58–75.
- 68 Plin. *HN* 36.55–58.
- 69 E.g., on the Nile flood, see Plin. *HN* 18.167–68; on its source, see Plin. *HN* 5.51–52.
- 70 The animals have been restored. In the view of Le Gall 1953a, 19, one was a horse and the others were a dog and two sheep.
- 71 Murphy 2004, 313–21.
- 72 Hom. *Il.* 3.3. Dasen 1993, 187–88; see Dasen 1994, 594 ff. for representations in Greek art.
- 73 On literary sources for pygmies, see Dasen 1993, 175–78. Along the Nile, see Plin. *HN* 6.187–89; Strabo 17.2.1. In India, see Verg. *G.* 4.293; Plin. *HN* 6.70 and 7.25; Luc. *Phras.* 9.528. In Thule, see Eust. *Il.* 3.6.
- 74 In India (Plin. *HN* 6.70, 7.25), near the Black Sea (Plin. *HN* 4.44) and at the source of the Nile (Plin. *HN* 6.188). For a general explanation of Pliny's “inconsistencies,” see Murphy 2004, 9–10.
- 75 Strabo 17.2.1: ὥς δ' εἰπεῖν, τὰ ἄκρα τῆς οἰκουμένης τὰ παρακείμενα τῇ δυσκράτῳ καὶ ἀοικήτῳ διὰ καύμα ἢ ψυχὸς ἀνάγκη ἀποτεύγματα εἶναι τῆς εὐκράτου καὶ ἐλαττώματ'· ταῦτα δ' ἐκ τῶν βίων δῆλα καὶ τῆς πρὸς τὰς χρεῖας τὰς ἀνθρωπικὰς ἀπορίας. κακόβιοί τε δὴ καὶ γυμνήτες εἰσι τὰ πολλὰ καὶ νομάδες· τὰ τε βοσκήματα αὐτοῖς ἐστί μικρά, πρόβατα καὶ αἴγες καὶ βόες· καὶ κύνες μικροί, τραχεῖς δὲ καὶ μάχιμοι. τάχα δὲ καὶ τοὺς Πυγμαίους ἀπὸ τῆς τούτων μικροφυῖας ὑπενόησαν καὶ ἀνέπλασαν· ἑωρακῶς μὲν γὰρ οὐδεὶς ἐξηγεῖται τῶν πίστεως ἁξίων ἀνδρῶν. *Emphasis added.*
- 76 Le Gall 1953a, 5–22.
- 77 See, e.g., Galinsky 1969.
- 78 Plut. *Rom.* 2.
- 79 For the flood of the Tiber as common to the foundation myths, see Aldrete 2007, 10–12, 261, n. 6. For the Tiber and Aeneas, see Verg. *Aen.* 8.57–63, 8.86–89. For the Tiber and the twins, see Livy 1.4.4–7.
- 80 Toynbee 1986, 142–43, describing the Hadrian series (later emulated by Antoninus Pius).
- 81 Hetland 2007.
- 82 For the public improvements along the river, see Aldrete 2007, 192–98. For a Trajanic date for the project and description, see Blake and Bishop 1973, 37–39; Gatti 1934. Trajanic *cippi* invoking both the authority of the emperor and the *curator alvei et riparum Tiberis et cloacarum urbis* were found all along the Tiber, including the Campus Martius. CIL 6.31549–31551 (on the office, see Aldrete 2007, 200–03; Le Gall 1953b, 135–83). There

is evidence that Hadrian followed through on the plans (as in the case of the finished Pantheon). For example, *cippi* (e.g., CIL 6.31552) also document the role of the *curator* of the Tiber under Hadrian.

- 83 For a survey of sources on Aeneas and Romulus and “memnotopoi” in Rome, see Rodríguez-Mayorgas 2010 and sources cited. For the two locations of the house of Romulus, see, e.g., Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 1.79.11 (as on the Palatine); CIL16.23 (a military diploma that states a copy was affixed on the Capitoline, near the house of Romulus); Mart. 8.80.5–6 (Capitoline). For discussion, see Balland 1984.
- 84 For the ritual uses of water in Isiac cult, see Wild 1981; Brenk 1999, 2003.
- 85 Juv. 15.1–13: *Quis nescit, Volusi Bithynice, qualia demens | Aegyptos portenta colat? crocodilon adorat | pars haec, illa pavet saturam serpentibus ibin. | effigies sacri nitet aurea cerco-pitheci, | dimidio magicae resonant ubi Memnone chordae | atque vetus Thebe centum iacet obruta portis. | illic aeluros, hic piscem fluminis, illic | oppida tota canem venerantur, nemo Dianam. | porrum et caepe nefas violare et frangere morsu | (o sanctas gentes, quibus haec nascuntur in hortis | numina!) lanatis animalibus abstinet omnis | mensa, nefas illic fetum iugulare capellae: | carnibus humanis vesci licet ...*
- 86 See, e.g., Moreau 1940; Highet 1949a; Powell 1979, all of whom took Juvenal as a starting point for investigating “Egyptian human sacrifice.” Griffiths 1949 took a more balanced approach but still considered Juvenal’s information to be historical. See also the critiques of this approach, Scobie 1973, 53–63; Fredericks 1976. Nevertheless, the view that the poem expresses “negative” views of Egyptians persists. See, e.g., the summary discussion in Isaac 2004, 364.
- 87 Scholia ad S XV, 1s: “He writes to Volusius concerning the sacred rites of the Egyptians, from a hatred of Crispinus, who was Egyptian and recently was made *magister peditum et equitum*.” *ad Volus<u>m scribit de Aegyptiorum sacris odio Crispini, quia Aegyptius erat [a]legens et modo magister peditum atque equitum factus est*. Contemporary sources make mention of a man named Crispinus who was an Egyptian trader in fish, associated with Domitian’s court (Mart. 7.99, 8.48). On the man as an historical individual, see Ferguson 1987, 72–83; Gérard 1976, 140–45. The scholiasts also insist on Juvenal’s autopsy: Scholia ad S XV, 27 “Juvenal speaks concerning himself, because he held the post of a soldier in Egypt, and he promises that he will tell those things, which he himself saw.” *de se dicit Iuvenalis, quia in Aegypto militem tenuit, et ea promittit se relaturum, quae ipse vidit*.
- 88 For Juvenal’s relationship to the genre and his predecessors, see especially Braund 1996, 1–15. For the various meanings, as a mixed dish of food, OLD s.v. *satura* 1, and as literary genre, see OLD s.v. *satura* 3b, 4.
- 89 See especially Keane 2007 especially 42–48, on the program of Juvenal’s last book; Fredericks 1976; McKim 1986. Other recent treatments argue for reassessment on stylistic grounds, e.g., Singleton 1983.
- 90 With the exception of Alston 1996, looking at Plutarch and Juvenal in a post-colonial context.
- 91 See for the allusion Courtney 1980, 592. Cicero *Tusc.* 5.78: “Who does not know of the customs of the Egyptians? Whose minds, steeped in delusions of depravity, would bear any penalty up to execution rather than violate an ibis or asp or a cat or a dog or a crocodile, even if they did something unaware.” *Aegyptiorum morem quis ignorat? quorum inbutae mentes pravitatis erroribus quamvis carnificinam prius subierint quam ibim aut aspidem aut faelem aut canem aut crocodilum violent, quorum etiam si imprudentes quidpiam fecerint, poenam nullam recusent*.
- 92 For *portenta* as prodigies, OLD s.v. *portentum* 2a; as conceits, OLD s.v. *portentum* 3a,b.
- 93 Cannibalism as distasteful to tragedians, see Juv. 15.31–32; Odysseus as a liar, see Juv. 15.16.
- 94 Fredericks 1976, n.9 for bibliography.
- 95 Val. Max. 7.6 ext. 3, and Courtney 1980, 603.
- 96 Juv. 15.159 *sed iam serpentum maior concordia...*
- 97 E.g., Juv. 15.131–158.
- 98 Juv. 15. 36–38: *quod numina vicinorum | odit uterque locus, cum solos credat habendos | esse deos quos ipse colit ...*

- 99 See Gowers 1993, 198–200, for the importance of eating “raw” in Juvenal 15 and other satires.
- 100 Juv. 15.171–74: ... *quid diceret ergo, | vel quo non fugeret, si nunc haec monstra videret | Pythagoras, cunctis animalibus abstinuit qui | tanquam homine et ventri indulsit non omne legumen?*
- 101 See Newmyer 2006, 19–21, for a review of later authors’ notions of Pythagorean vegetarianism, including Ovid, Plutarch, Porphyry, and Diogenes Laertes. See also Osborne 2007, 46–50.
- 102 See, e.g., Vasunia 2001, 209, 228. Note that Pythagoras’ refusal to eat plants also recalls lines 9–10, in which the Egyptians are said to venerate leeks and onions.
- 103 On the place of meat in ancient diets, see Garnsey 1999, 12–21 (noting the absolute necessity for legumes); Corbier 1989; Wilkens and Hill 2006, 142–54. For an anthropological view of meat as a symbol of civilization, see Fiddes 1992.
- 104 OLD s.v. *caro* 1, 3a, 3b. Note also the repeated use of this word, at Juv. 15.13, 88. For the full quotation, see note 91.
- 105 Juv. 15.4–5 *effigies*ⁿ¹ **sacri**^{a1} nitet *aurea*^{a1} **cercopitheci**ⁿ² | *dimidio*^{a1} **magicae**^{a2} resonant ubi Memnoneⁿ¹ **chordae**.ⁿ² The structure ideally creates a chiasmus around the verb, balancing two adjectives with their corresponding nouns (adjective 1, adjective 2, verb, noun 1, noun 2). For the importance of this structure as device throughout Juvenal’s corpus, see Braund 1996, 25.
- 106 Juv. 15.28: *calidae* ... *Copti*; Juv. 15.76: *umbrosae Tentura palmae*.
- 107 See Alston 1996.
- 108 For literary sources, see Smelik and Hemelrijk 1984, who in fact derived the title of their influential article from Juvenal 15.
- 109 For the cups, Iside V.52, V.53; AGR no. 283.
- 110 The findspot, with notes on their condition as found, is recorded in the *Notizie*, della Corte 1939, 223–25. For recent work on the shrine in the Praedia, see Parslow forthcoming. An impressive collection of expensive cult objects, some also in silver, were found therein.
- 111 RICIS 503/ 0301, temple treasury inventory from Nemi.
- 112 See discussion, Chapter 3.
- 113 See, e.g., discussion of the “Pheidias” baboon, Chapter 1.
- 114 The events in the poem occurred “recently, in the consulship of Iuncus,” *nuper consule Iunco*, Juv. 15.27, which provides a terminus post quem for the composition. Yet Courtney 1980, 598, notes that *nuper* is not specific; the date could be anytime after 127 CE.
- 115 There are variant traditions regarding Memnon, alternately considered to be king of the Ethiopians and king of the Trojans. On the statue, see especially Strabo 17.1.46, Plin. *HN* 36.58; for discussion of alternate identifications and traditions, see Philostr. *Her.* 3.4; Paus. 1.42.3. For discussion of the Colossus, see still Bernand and Bernand 1960, with full text and French translation of the epigrammata; Łukaszewicz 2010 and sources cited. On tourism in Roman Egypt, see Foertmeyer 1989.
- 116 Adams 2003, 546–55.
- 117 See, e.g., Bernand and Bernand 1960, no. 100 “being amazed, let them return to their homeland.” θα[υ]μάζοντες | διχωνται π[ρὸς] πατέρα[ν] (line 6).
- 118 See, e.g., Bernand and Bernand 1960, no. 53, which quotes *Il.* 5.373, or no. 101, for “Homerizing” language. See also the poetry of Julia Balbilla, which used Sapphic meter and diction, Rosenmeyer 2008.
- 119 Baillet 1926, no. 319. ... Νύμφαι Ὀρεστιάδες Νειλώϊον αἴπος ἐχουσα<ι>. Here, the structure appears to echo *Il.* 6.420 and also resonates with Theocr. 7.148. I thank Bill Hutton for his discussion of this example with me.
- 120 See, e.g., Baillet 1926, “syringe 9,” nos. 1277, 1283.
- 121 Pausanias says that they name the king “Phamenoph,” Paus. 1.42.3. For present purposes, the “accuracy” of the name he reports is less critical than the fact that he is aware there were alternate Egyptians traditions about the identity of the work. In fact, he is also named similarly, as “Phamenoth” in one of the epigraphs (Bernand and Bernand 1960, no. 31). Others name him slightly differently, as “Amenoth” (Bernand and Bernand 1960, no. 29).

- 122 See, for illustration, Talbert 2000, 80 A1 and B5 for Tentyra and Ombos/Omboi, respectively.
- 123 Most correct Juvenal to read “Tentyra” for “Tentura.” For the explicit argument that “Omboi” could not be Kom Ombo, see Courtney 1980, 598, n. 28.
- 124 Hight 1949a, criticized by Courtney 1980, 598, nn. 33–35.
- 125 Strabo 17.1.44.
- 126 Plin. *HN* 5.9.
- 127 Ptol. *Geog.* 4.5.68 (Stückelberger and Graßhoff 2006, 1.440): Τεντυρίτης νομός | καὶ μητρόπολις Τέντυρα.
- 128 Plin. *HN* 5.9.
- 129 Ptol. *Geog.* 4.5.73 (Stückelberger and Graßhoff 2006, 1.440).
- 130 See especially Talbert 2007.
- 131 See Talbert 2010, 136–42 and material cited, on the possible sources of the Peutinger Table. Of particular issue in recent work on cartographic representations (of whatever form) is their relationship with monumental inscriptions. Here the specter of the “map of Agrippa” looms large, described by Pliny as laying out the entire earth to be seen by the citizens of Rome, Plin. *HN* 3.17. There has been much debate about the form of this map and the way it presented its information. Reconstructions range from those imagining a circular *oikoumene* to those that suggest a division of the world in triptych form, with different sections projected on the north, east, and south walls of the porticus Vipsania. (See for general discussion of reconstructions, Carey 2003, 61–68. Also relevant to the debate are Murphy 2004, 23–24; Scott 2002, 5–22; Rutledge 2012, 204–6; Laehn 2013, 59–61). Brodersen 1995, 268–87, adopted the view that the “map” was not a visual representation at all but an inscription with distances by measurements. Yet, while it is not possible to say more about the shape or layout of Agrippa’s map, it is clear that it made scientific geographic knowledge public – as, indeed, did other known inscriptions. See also Salway 2001, especially 48–60.
- 132 Juv. 15.33–35, see note 136, for text.
- 133 For “Ombos”: Ombos P^{lem}. U^{schol.}; umbos *corr.* in ambos Bob.; combos Φ. For Tentura: tenara G; tent^ara U. (*app crit* after Willis 1997, 202).
- 134 Scholia ad S. XV, 35, 1–3: *Tentyra: accusativus pluralis, ut ‘Maenala’ Verg. Ecl. 10.55.*
- 135 See note 127.
- 136 Juv. 15.33–46: *inter finitimos vetus atque antiqua simulas, | immortale odium et nunquam sanabile vulnus, | ardet adhuc Ombos et Tentura. summus utrimque | inde furor vulgo, quod numina vicinorum | odit uterque locus, cum solos credat habendos | esse deos quos ipse colit. sed tempore festo | alterius populi rapienda occasio cunctis | visa inimicorum primoribus ac ducibus, ne | laetum hilaremque diem, ne magnae gaudia cenae | sentirent positis ad templa et compita mensis | pervigilique toro, quem nocte ac luce iacentem | septimus interdum sol invenit. horrida sane | Aegyptos, sed luxuria, quantum ipse notavi, | barbara famoso non cedit turba Canopo.*
- 137 Juv. 15.36 and 15.42. For many other examples of Roman ritual language, see Fredericks 1976.
- 138 Juv. 15.56–58: *... aspiceres iam cuncta per agmina vultus | dimidios, alias facies, et hiantia ruptis | ossa genis, plenos oculorum sanguine pugnos.*
- 139 Juv. 15.59–60, *pueriles ... acies.*
- 140 Juv. 15.62–88: *... ergo acrior impetus, et iam | saxa inclinatis per humum quaesita lacertis | incipiunt torquere, domestica seditioni | tela, nec hunc lapidem, quales et Turnus et Aiax, | vel quo Tydides percussit pondere coxam | Aeneae, sed quem valeant emittere dextrae | illis dissimiles et nostro tempore natae. | nam genus hoc vivo iam decrescebat Homero; | terra malos homines nunc educat atque pusillos. | ergo deus quicumque aspexit ridet et odit. | a deverticulo repetatur fabula. postquam | subsidiis aucti, pars altera promere ferrum | audet et infestis pugnam instaurare sagittis. | terga fugae celeri praestant instantibus Ombis | qui vicina colunt umbrosae Tentura palmae. | labitur hic quidam nimia formidine cursum | praecipitans capiturque. ast illum in plurima sectum | frustra et particulas, ut multis mortuus unus | sufficeret, totum corrosis ossibus edit | victrix turba, nec ardenti decoxit aeno |*

aut veribus: longum usque adeo tardumque putavit | exspectare focos, contenta cadavere crudo. | hic gaudere libet quod non violaverit ignem, | quem summa caeli raptum de parte, Prometheu, | donasti terris. elemento gratulor et te | exsultare reor. sed qui mordere cadaver | sustinuit, nil unquam hac carne libentius edit. Emphasis added.

- 141 Plin. *HN* 6.187; see on this passage Beagon 2005, 117, and sources cited.
- 142 For *pusillus* as small in size, see OLD *pusillus* s.v. 1, 2a, b, c. As a feeble man, e.g., Hor. *Sat.* 1.4, 17, Sen. *Ben.* 2.34.4, Sen. *Cl.* 1.15.5.
- 143 OLD s.v. *deverticulum* 1a, 1d; as bend in river, *TLL* s.v. *deverticulum* IB; as point of argument, *TLL* s.v. *deverticulum* 2a. Specifically as a rhetorical device, Quintilian *Inst.* 9.2.78; Val. Max. 2.6.9.
- 144 Juv. 15.119–31: ... *quis modo casus | impulit hos? quae tanta fames infestaque vallo | arma coegerunt tam detestabile monstrum | audere? anne aliam terra Memphitide sicca | invidiam facerent nolenti surgere Nilo? | qua nec terribiles Cimbri nec Bistones unquam | Sauromataeque truces aut immanes Agathyrsi, | hac saevit rabie imbelles et inutile vulgus, | parvula fictilibus solitum dare vela phaselis | et brevibus pictae remis incumbere testae. | nec poenam sceleri invenies nec digna parabis | supplicia his populis, in quorum mente pares sunt | et similes ira atque fames* ...
- 145 Further, many of these groups had been charged with human sacrifice or cannibalism, Courtney 1980, 606–07.
- 146 As pleasure boat, see Prop. 1.11.10; Mart. 10.3.13; Hor. *Carm.* 3.2.29.
- 147 Verg. *G.* 4.289. For the allusion, see Courtney 1980, 607, though he understands the vessels differently, as amphorae lashed together to make a float.
- 148 On the variants of these names, see Courtney 1980, 605–06.
- 149 Juv. 15.110–12: *nunc totus Graias nostrasque habet orbis Athenas | Gallia causicos docuit facunda Brittanos, | de conducendo loquitur rhetore Thyle.*

WORKS CITED AND CONSULTED

Abbreviations

I employ the conventions of the *American Journal of Archaeology* with the additions noted here.

AGR	Beck, H., P. Bol, and M. Bückling, eds. 2005. <i>Ägypten – Griechenland – Rom: Abwehr und Berührung</i> . Tübingen: Ernst Wasmuth.
Alla ricerca	de Caro, S., ed. 1992. <i>Alla ricerca di Iside: analisi, studi e restauri dell'Iseo pompeiano nel Museo di Napoli</i> . Roma: ARTI.
Egittomania	de Caro, S., ed. 2006a. <i>Egittomania: Iside e il mistero</i> . Milan: Electa.
Iside	Arslan, E., F. Tiraditti, M. Abbiati Brida, and A. Magni, eds. 1997. <i>Iside: il mito, il mistero, la magia</i> . Milan: Electa.
KRI	Kitchen, K. 1969–2003. <i>Ramesside Inscriptions, Translated and Annotated Notes and Comments</i> , 5 vols. Oxford: Blackwell.
Moretti	Moretti, L. ed. 1968. <i>Inscriptiones Graecae Urbis Romae</i> , 4 vols. Rome: Arte Tipografica.
PAH	Fiorelli, G., ed. 1860–64. <i>Pompeianarum Antiquitatum Historia</i> , 3 vols. Naples.
RICIS	Bricault, L. 2005. <i>Recueil des inscriptions concernant les cultes isiaques</i> . Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres 31. Paris: de Boccard.

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PLATE I. Panel painting depicting an Egyptian ritual, Herculaneum (first century CE).

Photo credit: Scala / Art Resource, NY.



PLATE II. Pinax with Egyptian figure and Sobek venerating an Apis bull (detail of figure 1.18), Boscotrecase (c. 11 BCE)

Photo credit: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY.



PLATE III. Cameo glass flask with scenes of an Egyptian sanctuary (early first century CE).
Photo credit: The J. Paul Getty Museum, Villa Collection, Malibu, California.



PLATE IV. Paintings from the sacrum of the sanctuary of Isis in Pompeii: Isis on the Nile (c. 62–79 CE).

Photo credit: © Vanni Archive / Art Resource, NY.



PLATE V. Painting from the ekklesiasterion, sanctuary of Isis in Pompeii: Io, Argus, and Mercury (c. 62–79 CE).

Photo credit: author; courtesy: Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei.



PLATE VI. Painting from the ekklesiasterion, sanctuary of Isis in Pompeii: Io and Isis on the banks of the Nile (c. 62–79 CE).

Photo credit: © Vanni Archive / Art Resource, NY.



PLATE VII. Painting from the House of the Doctor, Pompeii (VII 5, 24, peristyle g) depicting pygmies fighting animals (mid-to-late first century CE).

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PLATE VIII. Nile Mosaic, Praeneste (120–10 BCE).

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